Tommy Trot's Visit To Santa Claus

Thomas Nelson Page

L. LEFFLER

TOMMY TROT'S VISIT
TO SANTA CLAUS

A CAPTURED
SANTA CLAUS

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What was their horror to find that they both had forgotten to load their guns.

TOMMY TROT'S VISIT TO SANTA CLAUS

A CAPTURED SANTA CLAUS

BY

THOMAS NELSON PAGE

ILLUSTRATED

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TO

THE GREATEST LOVER OF CHILDREN
THE AUTHOR HAS EVER KNOWN
AND TO THE CHILDREN SHE LOVES
BEST IN ALL THE WORLD

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TOMMY TROT'S VISIT TO SANTA CLAUS

TOMMY TROT'S VISIT TO SANTA CLAUS

I

THE little boy whose story is told here lived in the beautiful country of "Once upon a Time." His name, as I heard it, was Tommy Trot; but I think that, maybe, this was only a nick-name. When he was about your age, he had, on Christmas Eve, the wonderful adventure of seeing Santa Claus in his own country, where he lives and makes all the beautiful things that boys and girls get at Christmas. In fact, he not only went to see him in his own wonderful city away up toward the North Pole, where the snow never melts and the Aurora lightens up the

sky; but he and his friend, Johnny Stout, went with dogs and guns to hunt the great polar bear whose skin afterwards always lay in front of the big library fireplace in Tommy's home.

This is the way it all happened.

Tommy lived in a big house on top of quite a high hill, not far from a town which could be seen clearly from the front portico and windows. Around the house was a large lawn with trees and shrubbery in it, and at the back was a big lot, in one corner of which stood the stables and barns, while on the other side sloped down a long steep hill to a little stream bordered with willows and maples and with a tract of woodland beyond. This lot was known as the "cow-pasture," and the woodland was known as the "wood-lot," while yet beyond was a field which Peake, the farmer, always spoke of as the "big field." On

the other side of the cow-lot, where the stables stood, was a road which ran down the hill and across the stream and beyond the woods, and on the other side of this road near the bottom of the hill was the little house in which lived Johnny Stout and his mother. They had no fields or lots, but only a backyard in which there were chickens and pigeons and, in the Fall, just before Tommy's visit to Santa Claus, two white goats, named "Billy" and "Carry," which Johnny had broken and used to drive to a little rough wagon which he had made himself out of a box set on four wheels.

Tommy had no brothers or sisters, and the only cousins he had in town were little girls younger than himself, to whom he had to "give up" when any one was around, so he was not as fond of them as he should have been; and Sate, his dog, a

terrier of temper and humours, was about his only real playmate. He used to play by himself and he was often very lonely, though he had more toys than any other boy he knew. In fact, he had so many toys that he was unable to enjoy any one of them very long, and after having them a little while he usually broke them up. He used to enjoy the stories which his father read to him out of Mother Goose and the fairy-books and the tales he told him of travellers and hunters who had shot lions and bears and Bengal tigers; but when he grew tired of this, he often wished he could go out in the street and play all the time like Johnny Stout and some of the other boys. Several times he slipped out into the road beyond the cow-lot to try to get a chance to play with Johnny, who was only about a year older than he, but could do so many things which Tommy could not

do that he quite envied him. It was one of the proudest days of his life when Johnny let him come over and drive his goats, and when he went home that evening, although he was quite cold, he was so full of having driven them that he could not think or talk of anything else, and when Christmas drew near, one of the first things he wrote to ask Santa Claus for, when he put the letter in the library fire, was a wagon and a pair of goats. Even his father's statement that he feared he was too small yet for Santa Claus to bring him such things, did not wholly dampen his hope.

He even began to dream of being able to go out some time and join the bigger boys in coasting down the long hill on the other side from Johnny Stout's, for though his father and mother thought he was still rather small to do this, his father had promised that he might do it some time, and

Tommy thought "some time" would be after his next birthday. When the heavy snow fell just before Christmas he began to be sorry that he had broken up the sled Santa Claus had given him the Christmas before. In fact, Tommy had never wanted a sled so much as he did the afternoon two days before Christmas, when he persuaded his father to take him out again to the coasting hill to see the boys coasting. There were all sorts of sleds: short sleds and long sleds, bob-sleds and flexible fliers. They held one, two, three, and sometimes even half a dozen boys and girls—for there were girls, too—all shouting and laughing as they went flying down the hill, some sitting and some lying down, but all flying and shouting, and none taking the least notice of Tommy. Sate made them take notice of him; for he would rush out after the sleds, barking just as if they had been cats, and several times he got bowled over

—once, indeed, he got tangled up in the string of a sled and was dragged squealing with fright down the hill. Suddenly, however, Tommy gave a jump. Among the sleds flying by, most of them painted red, and very fine looking, was a plain, unpainted one, and lying full length upon it, on his stomach, with his heels high in the air, was Johnny Stout, with a red comforter around his neck, and a big cap pulled down over his ears. Tommy knew him at once.

"Look, father, look!" he cried, pointing; but Johnny's sled was far down the hill before his father could see him. A few minutes later he came trudging up the hill again and, seeing Tommy, ran across and asked him if he would like to have a ride. Tommy's heart bounded, but sank within him again when his father said, "I am afraid he is rather little."

"Oh! I'll take care of him, sir," said

Johnny, whose cheeks were glowing. Tommy began to jump up and down.

"Please, father, please," he urged. His father only smiled.

"Why, you are not so very big yourself," he said to Johnny.

"Big enough to take care of him," said Johnny.

"Why, father, he's awful big," chimed in Tommy.

"Do you think so?" laughed his father. He turned to Johnny. "What is your name?"

"Johnny, sir. I live down below your house." He pointed across toward his own home.

"I know him," said Tommy proudly. "He has got goats and he let me drive them."

"Yes, he can drive," said Johnny, condescendingly, with a nod, and Tommy was

proud of his praise. His father looked at him.

"Is your sled strong?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. I made it myself," said Johnny, and he gave the sled a good kick to show how strong it was.

"All right," said Tommy's father. They followed Johnny to the top of the slide, and Tommy got on in front and his father tucked his coat in.

"Hold on and don't be afraid," he said.

"Afraid!" said Tommy contemptuously. Just then Johnny, with a whoop and a push which almost upset Tommy, flung himself on behind and away they went down the hill, as Johnny said, "just ski-uting."

Tommy had had sledding in his own yard; but he had never before had any real coasting like this, and he had never dreamed before of anything like the thrill of dashing down that long hill, flying like the wind,

with Johnny on behind, yelling "Look out!" to every one, and guiding so that the sled tore in and out among the others, and at the foot of the hill actually turned around the curve and went far on down the road.

"You're all right," said Johnny, and Tommy had never felt prouder. His only regret was that the hill did not tilt up the other way so that they could coast back instead of having to trudge back on foot.

When they got back again to the top of the hill, Tommy's father wanted to know if they had had enough, but Tommy told him he never could have enough. So they coasted down again and again, until at length his father thought they had better be going home, and Johnny said he had to go home, too, "to help his mother."

"How do you help?" asked Tommy's father, as they started off.

Tommy had never before had any real coasting like this.

"Oh, just little ways," said Johnny. "I get wood—and split it up—and go to Mr. Bucket's and get her things for her—draw water and feed the cow, when we had a cow—we ain't got a cow now since our cow died—and—oh—just a few little things like that."

Tommy's father made no reply, and Tommy, himself, was divided between wonder that Johnny could call all that work "just a few little things," and shame that he should say, "ain't got," which he, himself, had been told he must never say.

His father, however, presently asked, "Who is Mr. Bucket?"

"Don't you know Mr. Bucket?" said Johnny. "He keeps that grocery on Hill Street. He gave me the box I made this old thing out of."

"Oh," said Tommy's father, and turned and looked the sled over again.

"What was the matter with your cow?" asked Tommy.

"Broke her leg—right here," and Johnny pulled up his trousers and showed just where the leg was broken below the knee. "The doctor said she must be killed, and so she was; but Mr. Bucket said he could have saved her if the 'Siety would've let him. He'd 'a' just swung her up until she got well."

"How?" asked Tommy, much interested.

"What Society?" asked his father.

Johnny answered the last question first. "'Pervention of Cruelty,'" he said, shortly.

"Oh," said Tommy's father.

"I know how she broke her leg," said Johnny.

"How did she break her leg?" inquired Tommy.

"A boy done it. I know him and I know

he done it, and some day I'm going to catch him when he ain't looking for me."

"You have not had a cow since?" inquired Tommy's father. "Then you do not have to go and drive her up and milk her when the weather is cold."

"Oh, I would not mind that," said Johnny cheerily. "I'd drive her up if the weather was as cold as Greenland, and milk her, too, so I had her. I used to love to feed her and I didn't mind carryin' milk around; for I used to get money for it for my mother to buy things with; but now, since that boy broke her leg and the 'Siety killed her——"

He did not say what there was since; he just stopped talking and presently Tommy's father said: "You do not have so much money since?"

"No, sir!" said Johnny, "and my mother has to work a heap harder, you see."

"And you work too?"

"Some," said Johnny. "I sell papers and clean off the sidewalk when there is snow to clean off, and run errands for Mr. Bucket and do a few things. Well, I've got to go along," he added, "I've got some things to do now. I was just trying this old sled over on the hill to see how she would go. I've got some work to do now"; and he trotted off, whistling and dragging his sled behind him.

As Tommy and his father turned into their grounds, his father asked, "Where did he say he lived?"

"Wait, I'll show you," said Tommy, proud of his knowledge. "Down there [pointing]. See that little house down in the bottom, away over beyond the cow-pasture?"

"How do you know he lives there?"

"Because I've been there. He's got

goats," said Tommy, "and he let me drive them. I wish I had some goats. I wish Santa Claus would bring me two goats like Johnny's."

"Which would you rather have? Goats or a cow?" asked his father.

"Goats," said Tommy, promptly.

"I wonder if Johnny would!" laughed his father.

"Father, where is Greenland?" said Tommy, presently.

"A country away up at the North—away up in that direction." His father pointed far across the cow-pasture, which lay shining in the evening light. "I must show it to you on the map."

"Is it very cold there?" asked Tommy.

"Very cold in winter."

"Colder than this?"

"Oh, yes, because it is so far north that the sun never gets up in winter to warm

it, and away up there the winter is just one long night and the summer one long day."

"Why, that's where Santa Claus comes from," said Tommy. "Do people live up there?"

"People called Eskimos," said his father, "who live by fishing and hunting."

"Tell me about them," said Tommy. "What do they hunt?"

"Bears," said his father, "polar bears—and walrus—and seals—and——"

"Oh, tell me about them," said Tommy, eagerly.

So, as they walked along, his father told him of the strange little, flat-faced people, who live all winter in houses made of ice and snow and hunted on the ice-floes for polar bears and seals and walrus, and in the summer got in their little kiaks and paddled around, hunting for seals and walrus with

their arrows and harpoons, on the "pans" or smooth ice, where every family of "harps" or seals have their own private door, gnawed down through the ice with their teeth.

"I wish I could go there," said Tommy, his eyes gazing across the long, white glistening fields with the dark border of the woodland beyond and the rich saffron of the winter sky above the tree-tops stretching across in a border below the steely white of the upper heavens.

"What would you do?" asked his father.

"Hunt polar bears," said Tommy, promptly. "I'd get one most as big as the library, so mother could give you the skin; because I heard her say she would like to have one in front of the library fire, and the only way she could get one would be to give it to you for Christmas."

His father laughed. "All right, get a big one."

"You will have to give me a gun. A real gun that will shoot. A big one—so big." Tommy measured with his arms out straight. "Bigger than that. And I tell you what I would do. I would get Johnny and we would hitch his goats to the sled and drive all the way up there and hunt polar bears, and I'd hunt for sealskins, too, so you could give mother a coat. I heard her say she wanted you to give her one. Wouldn't it be fine if I could get a great big bearskin and a sealskin, too! I wish I had Johnny's goats!"

"You must have dogs up there to draw your sled," said his father.

"All right! After I got there I would get Santa Claus to give me some," said Tommy. "But you give me the gun."

His father laughed again. "Well, maybe—some day," said he.

"'Some day' is too far away," said Tommy. "I want to go now."

"Not so far away when you are my age," said his father, smiling. "Ah, there is where the North Star is," he said, pointing. "You cannot see it yet. I will show it to you later, so you can steer by it."

"That is the way Santa Claus comes," said Tommy, his eyes on the Northern sky. "I am going to wait for him to-morrow night."

"You know he does not bring things to boys who keep awake!"

"I know; but I won't let him see me."

As they trudged along Tommy suddenly asked, "Don't you wish, father, Santa Claus would bring Johnny a cow for his mother?"

"Why, yes," said his father.

"Like Cowslip or Rose or even old Crumpled Horn?"

"Like our cows!" echoed his father, absently. "Why, yes."

"Because they are all fine cows, you know. Peake says so, and Peake knows a good cow," said Tommy, proud of his intimacy with the farmer. "I tell you what I am going to do when I get home," he declared. "I am going to write another letter to Santa Claus and put it in the chimney and ask him to send Johnny a whole lot of things: a cow and a gun and all sorts of things. Do you think it's too late for him to get it now?"

"I don't know. It is pretty late," said his father. "Why didn't you ask him to send these things to Johnny when you wrote your other letter?"

"I did not think of it," said Tommy, frankly. "I forgot him."

"Do you ask only for yourself?"

"No. For little sis and mother and

Peake and one other, but I'm not going to tell you who he is."

His father smiled. "Not Johnny?"

"No," said Tommy. "I forgot him."

"I am afraid I did, too," said his father, slowly. "Well, write another and try. You can never tell. Trying is better than crying."

This was two days before Christmas. And the next afternoon Tommy went again with his father to the coasting hill to see the boys and once more take a coast with Johnny. But no Johnny was there and no other boy asked Tommy if he wanted a ride. So they returned home much disappointed, his father telling him more about the Eskimos and the polar bears. But, just as they were turning the corner before reaching the gate which led into their grounds, they came on Johnny struggling along through the snow, under the weight

of a big basket full of bundles. At sight of them he swung the basket down in the snow with a loud, "Whew, that's heavy! I tell you." Tommy ran forward to meet him.

"We have been looking for you," he said.

"I could not go to-day," explained Johnny. "I had to work. I am working for Mr. Bucket to-day to make some money to buy Christmas things."

"How much do you make?" asked Tommy's father.

"Half a dollar to-day, if I work late. I generally make ten cents, sometimes fifteen."

"That is a pretty heavy load—in the snow," said Tommy's father, as Johnny stooped and swung his basket up on his hip.

"Oh, I can manage it," said the boy, cheerfully. "A boy stole my sled last night, or I would carry it on that."

"Stole your sled!" cried Tommy.

"Yes, I left it outside the door when I was getting my load to put on, and when I came out it was gone. I wish I could catch him."

"I am going to watch for him, too," said Tommy.

"If I had a box I could make another one," said Johnny. "Maybe Mr. Bucket will give me one after Christmas. He said maybe he would. Then I will give you another ride." He called over his shoulder to them, as he trudged off, "Well, good-by. I hope you will have a merry Christmas, and that Santa Claus will bring you lots of things," and away he trudged. They wished him a merry Christmas, too, and then turned into their grounds.

"Father," said Tommy, suddenly, "let's give Johnny a sled."

"Yes," said his father, "you might give him yours—the one you got last Christmas."

"I haven't got it now. It's gone," said Tommy.

"Did some one take it—like Johnny's?"

"No, I broke it," said Tommy, crestfallen.

"You might mend it?" suggested his father.

"I broke it all up," said Tommy, sadly.

"Ah, that is a pity," said his father.

Tommy was still thinking.

"Father, why can't I give him a box?" he said. "The basement and the woodshed are full of big boxes."

"Why not give him the one I gave you a few days ago?"

"I broke it up, too," said Tommy shamefacedly.

"Oh," said his father. "That's a pity. Johnny could have made a sled out of it." Tommy felt very troubled, and he began to think what he might do.

"If you will give me another, I will give it to Johnny," he said presently.

"Why, I'll tell you what I will do," said his father. "I will furnish the box if you will carry it over to Johnny's home."

"All right. I will do it," said Tommy promptly. So as soon as they reached home Tommy dived down into the basement and soon came out, puffing and blowing, dragging along with him a big box as high as his head.

"I am afraid that is too big for you to carry," suggested his father.

"Oh, I will make Richard carry it."

"Richard is my servant, not yours," said his father. "Besides, you were to carry it yourself."

"It is too big for me. The snow is too deep."

"Now, if you had not broken up your sled you might carry it on that," said his father.

"Yes," said Tommy sadly. "I wish I had not broken it up. I'll be bound that I don't break up the next one I get."

"That's a good beginning," said his father. "But wishing alone will never do anything, not even if you had the magical wishing-cap I read you about. You must not only wish; you must help yourself. Now, Johnny would make a sled out of that box."

"I wish I could," said Tommy. "I would try if I had some tools. I wish I had some tools."

"What tools would you need?"

Tommy thought a minute. "Why, a hammer and some nails."

"A hammer and nails would hardly make a sled by themselves."

"Why, no. I wish I had a saw, too."

"I thought Santa Claus brought you all these tools last Christmas?" suggested his father.

"He did; but I lost them," said Tommy.

"Did you ever hunt for them?"

"Some. I have hunted for the hammer."

"Well, suppose you hunt again. Look everywhere. If you find any I might lend you the others. You might look in my lumber room." Tommy ran off and soon returned with a hammer and some nails which he had found, and a few minutes later his father brought a saw and a hatchet, and they selected a good box, which Tommy could drag out, and put it in the back hall.

"Now," said Tommy, "what shall we do next?"

"That is for you to say," said his father. "Johnny does not ask that question. He thinks for himself."

"Well, we must knock this box to pieces," said Tommy.

"I think so, too," assented his father.

"Very carefully, so as not to split the boards."

"Yes, very carefully," said Tommy, and he began to hammer. The nails, however, were in very tight and there was a strip of iron along each of the edges, through which they were driven, so it was hard work; but when Tommy really tried and could not get the boards off, his father helped him, and soon the strips were off and the boards quickly followed.

"Now what shall we do?" asked his father.

"Why, we must make the sled."

"Yes—but how?"

"Why, we must have runners and then the top to sit on. That's all."

"Very well. Go ahead," said his father. So Tommy picked up two boards and looked at them. But they were square at the ends.

"We must make the runners," he said sadly.

"That's so," said his father.

"Will you saw them for me?" asked Tommy.

"Yes, if you will show me where to saw."

Tommy pondered.

"Wait," he said, and he ran off, and in a moment came back with a picture of a sled in a magazine. "Now make it this way," he said, showing his father how he should saw the edges.

He was surprised to see how well his father could do this, and his admiration for him increased as he found that he could handle the tools quite as well as Peake, the farmer; and soon the sled began to look like a real sled with runners, sawed true, and with cross-pieces for the feet to rest on, and even with a strip of iron, taken from the edges of the boxes, carefully nailed on the bottom of the runners.

Suddenly Tommy cried, "Father, why not give Johnny this sled?"

"The very thing!" exclaimed his father with a smile. And Tommy felt quite proud of having suggested it.

"I wish it had a place to hitch on the goats," said Tommy, thoughtfully.

"Let's make one," said his father; and in a few minutes two holes were bored in the front of the runners.

It was now about dusk, and Tommy said he would like to take the sled down to Johnny's house and leave it at his door where he could find it when he came home from work, and, maybe, he might think Santa Claus had brought it. So he and his father went together, Tommy dragging the sled and, while his father waited at the gate, Tommy took the sled and put it in the yard at the little side-door of Johnny's home. As they were going along, he said,

pointing to a small shed-like out-building at the end of the little yard, "That's the cow-house. He keeps his goats there, too. Don't you wish Santa Claus would bring his mother a cow? I don't see how he could get down that small chimney!" he said, gazing at the little flue which came out of the roof. "I wonder if he does?"

"I wonder if he does?" said his father to himself.

When Tommy slipped back again and found his father waiting for him at the gate, he thought he had never had so fine a time in all his life. He determined to make a sled for somebody every Christmas.

II

WHEN they reached home Tommy, after warming his hands and telling his mother about the sled, set to work to write a letter to Santa Claus on behalf of Johnny, and as he wrote, a number of things came to him that he thought Johnny would like to have. He remembered that he had no gloves and that his hands were very red; that his cap was very old and too small for him; that a real flexible flier would be a fine thing for him. Then, as he had asked for a gun for himself to hunt polar bears with and a fur coat to go out with in the snow, he added these in Johnny's letter also; in fact, he asked for Johnny just the things he had asked for himself, except the goats, and, as Johnny had two goats, it was not necessary to ask for them for him. In-

stead of goats, however, he asked that Santa Claus might give Johnny's mother a cow, as good as one of their cows. As he was not a very rapid writer it took him some time to write this letter, especially as he did not know how to spell a good many words, and had to ask his mother how to spell them, for his father had gone out soon after their return from taking the sled to Johnny, and immediately after showing him the picture of the polar bear and the map of the North Pole region. Then when the letter was all done, signed and sealed, Tommy carefully dropped it in the fire in the library, and watched it as it first twisted up, then burst into a blaze, and finally disappeared in flame and smoke up the big chimney, hoping that it would blow away like the wind to Santa Claus to catch him before he started out that night on his round of visits.

By this time his supper was ready and he found that he was very hungry. He had no sooner finished it than he drew up in a big chair by the warm fire, and began to wonder whether Santa Claus would get his letter in time, and, if so, what he would bring Johnny. The fire was warm and his eyes soon began "to draw straws," but he did not wish to go to bed quite yet and, indeed, had a lingering hope that when his father returned he might coax him into letting him go out again and slide with Johnny and then, perhaps, stand a chance of seeing Santa Claus come up the long hill, with his reindeer flying like the wind over the snow and taking the roofs of the houses with a single bound. So he moved over to the sofa where he could see better, and where it would not be likely his sleepiness would be observed.

The last thing he recalled in the sitting-

room was when he parted the heavy curtains at the foot of the sofa and looked out at the snow stretching away down the hill toward the woods, and shining in the light of the great round moon which had just come up over the side of the yard to the eastward. Then he curled up in the corner of the sofa as wide awake as a boy could be who had made up his mind to keep awake until midnight. The next thing he remembered was Sate jumping up and snuggling by him, and the next was his father coming in and telling him Johnny was waiting outside with his sled and the two goats hitched to it to take a long ride, and his wrapping him up carefully in his heavy overcoat. In a second he was out in the yard and made a dash for the cow-lot, and there, sure enough, was Johnny waiting for him at the gate in the cow-pasture with a curious little peaked cap on his head and his coat collar

turned up around his chin and tied with a great red comforter, so that only his eyes and nose peeped over it. As Tommy had never seen Johnny with that cap on before, he asked him where he had got it, and he said he had swapped caps with a little old man he had met driving a cow in the road as he came home. He could not keep this cap on his head, so Johnny had given him his in place of it, as it fitted him very well. And there were the two goats hitched to the very sled Tommy had made. In a minute they were on the sled, Tommy in front with the reins and Johnny sitting behind. Just as they were about to start, to Tommy's horror, out came Sate, and do as they might, Sate would not go back; but jumped up on the sled and settled down at Tommy's feet, and as Johnny said he did not mind and that Sate would keep Tommy's feet warm, they let him stay, which proved in the end

to be a very fortunate thing. Just after they had fixed themselves comfortably, Johnny said, "Are you ready?" "Ready!" said Tommy, and gathered up the reins, and the next moment the goats started off, at first at a walk and then at a little trot, while Tommy was telling Johnny what his father had told him about the night in Santa Claus's country being so long that sometimes the sun did not rise above the horizon for several months.

"If it's as long as that," said Johnny, "we might go and see the old fellow and get back before midnight? I wish we could go."

"So do I," said Tommy, "but I'm afraid we might not find our way." He remembered just then that all one had to do was to steer by the North Star, and at that moment he caught sight of the star right over the goats' heads.

The coast was clear and the snow was up to the top of the fences. The moon made it as light as day and never again would there be such a chance. It came to him, too, that on the map all the lines ran together at the North Pole, so that one could hardly miss his way, and if he should, there were Eskimos to guide him. So when Johnny said, "Let's go and try," he agreed, for if they once got there, Santa Claus, himself, might bring them back with him.

For a moment they went along as though they were coasting down a hill, with the little North Star shining directly in front of them as they glided along.

Just then Tommy said, "I wish the goats were reindeer. Let's pretend they are."

"So do I," said Johnny.

At this instant something happened; the goats gave a jump which sent a cloud of fine snow up into the boys' faces; the sled

gave a great leap and on a sudden they began to tear along like the wind. The snow-fields flew by them, and the trees, standing up to their knees in snow, simply tore along to the rear.

"They are running away!" said Tommy, as soon as he could catch his breath.

"All right. Let them run," said Johnny. "But steer by the North Star." And so they did.

When the cloud of snow in their faces cleared away, Tommy could scarcely believe his eyes.

"Look, Johnny!" he cried. "They are real reindeer. Real live ones. Look at their antlers."

"I know," said Johnny. "That little man said he wanted to swap with me."

So they flew on, up hill and down dale, over fields of white snow where the fences and rocks were buried and the cuts were

filled up level; down frozen streams, winding through great forests where the pines were mantled with white; in between great walls of black rock towering above them, with the stars shining down like fires; out again across the vast stretches of snow with the Pole Star ever twisting and turning and coming before them again, until the sky seemed lit up with wonderful colours, and great bands of light were shooting up and sinking down only to shoot up again with a crackling like packs of pop-crackers in the distance.

The wind sang in their ears, nipped their noses, and made Tommy drowsy, and presently he must have fallen asleep; for just as he was conscious that Johnny had taken the reins, and, with one arm on either side of him was holding him on his shoulder, there was a great jolt and a sort of crash as of breaking through. He would

have fallen off the sled if Johnny had not held him tight.

When he opened his eyes they seemed to be passing through a sort of silvery haze, as though the moonlight were shining through a fine mist of silvery drops which shed the softest radiance over everything. And suddenly through this enchanting light they came to a beautiful city, with walls around it of crystal, all rimmed with gold, like the clouds at sunset. Before them was a great gate through which shone a wonderful light, and inside they saw a wide street all lit up. As they reached the gate there was a sort of peal, as of bells, and out poured a guard of little men in uniform with little swords at their sides and guns in their hands, who saluted, while their officer, who had a letter in his hand, halted them with a challenge.

"Who goes there?"

"Friends," said Tommy, standing up and saluting, as he had seen soldiers do at the fort.

"Advance, friends, and give the countersign." Tommy thought they were lost and his heart sank.

But Johnny said, "'Good-will.'"

"All right," said the captain and stepped back.

"Who gave you that sled?" he asked.

"Tommy," said Johnny. "This little boy here made it and gave it to me."

"This is the one," said the captain to a guard, looking at a letter in his hand. "Let them by."

They drove in at the gate and found themselves in a broad street filled with enchanting things more beautiful than Tommy had ever dreamed of. The trees which lined it were Christmas trees, and the lights on them made the street as bright as noonday.

Here the reindeer slackened their pace, and as they turned down the great street they could see through the windows rooms brilliantly lighted, in which were hosts of people bustling about as busy as bees, working at Christmas things of all sorts and descriptions. They suddenly came to the gate of a great palace-like place, which the reindeer appeared to know, for they turned in at the gate just as Tommy's father's horses always turned in at their gate at home, and as they drove up to the door, with a shout of, "Here they are!" out poured a number of the same little people—like those they had already seen at the gate. Some helped them out, some stood like a guard, and some took their reindeer to drive them to the stable.

"You are just in time," said the captain of this party, as he stepped forward and saluted them. "The old Gentleman has

been waiting for you, sending out to the gate to watch for you all evening."

Tommy was about to ask, "How did he know we were coming?" but before he could get the words out, the little man said, "Oh, he knows all that boys do, especially about Christmas time. That's his business."

"My!" thought Tommy, "I shall have to mind what I even think up here. He answers just as if I had said it. I hope he knows what I want for Christmas."

"Wait and see," said the little man; and Tommy, though he was glad to hear it, determined not to think any more just then, but he was sorry he had not thought to wish for more things while he was wishing.

"Oh, don't worry about that," said the guard. "Santa Claus doesn't care much what you ask for for yourself. Even if he gives those things, you soon get tired of

them or lose them or break them up. It is the things one asks for for others that he gives pleasure with. That's the reason he has such a good time himself, because he gives all the things to others."

Tommy tried to think what he had ever given to any one. He had given pieces of candy and cake when he had plenty, but the sled was the only thing he had ever really given. He was about to mention this when the guard mentioned it for him.

"Oh, that sled was all right," he said, with a little nod. "Come in," and the great ice-doors opened before them, and in they walked.

They passed through a great hall, all ice, as transparent as glass, though curiously it was warm and dry and filled with every kind of Christmas "things"—everything that Tommy had ever seen, and a myriad more that he had never dreamed of. They

were packed and stacked on either side, and a lot of little people, like those he had already seen, were working among them, tossing them about and shouting to each other with glee to "Look out," just as the boys did when coasting on the hill.

"I tell you," said one, "the Governor will have a busy time to-night. It beats last Christmas." And he made a run and a jump, and lit on a big pile of bundles which suddenly toppled over with him and nearly buried him as he sprawled on the slippery floor. This seemed a huge joke to all the others and they screamed with laughter at "Old Smartie," as they called him, and poured more bundles down on him, just as though they were having a pillow-fight. Then when Old Smartie had at last gotten on his feet, they had a great game of tag among the piles and over them, and the first thing Tommy knew he and Johnny were at it as hard as anybody. He was

very proud because Johnny could jump over piles as high as the best of them. Tommy, himself, however, could not jump; for they led him to a pile so high that he could not see over it; and on top were the fragments of all the things he had ever had and had broken up. He could not help crying a little; but just then in dashed a number of little men and gathering them up, rushed out with them. Tommy was wondering what they were going to do with them, when his friend, the guard, said: "We mend some of them; and some we keep to remind you with. Now try again." Tommy tried and did very well, only his left foot had gone to sleep in the sled and had not quite waked up.

"That was because Sate went to sleep on it," said his friend, the guard, and Tommy wondered how he knew Sate's name.

"Why," said the guard, "we have to

know dogs' names to keep them from barking at us and waking everybody up. Let me lend you these boots," and with that he kicked off his boots. "Now, jump," and Tommy gave a jump and lit in them, as he sometimes did in his father's shoes. No sooner had Tommy put them on than he found that he could jump over the highest pile in the room.

"Look, look!" cried several of the others. "The captain has lent that little boy his 'Seven Leaguers.'"

"I know where he is going," said one; "to jump over the North Pole."

"No," laughed another. "He is going to catch the cow that 'jumped over the moon,' for Johnny Stout's mother."

Just then a message came that "Old Santa," as they called him, was waiting to see the two boys who had come in the new box-sled, as he wanted to know how their

mothers were and what they wished for Christmas. So there was a great scurrying to get their heads brushed before the bell rang again, and Tommy got soap in his eyes wetting the brush to make his hair lie smooth, while Johnny's left shoe came off and dropped in a hole in the floor. Smartie, however, told him that that was for the "Old Woman who lived in a shoe" to feed her cow in, and this was considered a great joke.

The next minute the door opened and they entered a great apartment, filled with the softest light from a blazing fire, and Tommy was sure it was his father's back before him at the fireplace; but when the man turned it was Santa Claus, only he did not have on his whiskers, and looked ever so much younger than in his pictures. At first he did not even look at them, he was so busy receiving mail that came fluttering

down the chimney in a perfect snowstorm. As the letters came he gathered them up and handed them to a lady who was seated on the floor, saying, "Put that in," to which the lady always answered, "Just the thing" in a voice so like his mother's that Tommy felt quite at home. He was just wondering when "Sometime" would come, when Santa Claus picked up a letter, which had been thrown on the floor, and tossed it to the lady, saying, "Here's that letter from that little boy, Tommy Trot. Put some of those things in so he can break them up. He asked only for himself and much joy he will get out of them." Tommy shrank back behind Johnny. He wanted to say that he had written another letter to ask for things for others, but he had lost his tongue. Just then, however, Santa Claus put up his hand and pulled out another letter.

"Now," he said, as he glanced at it, "this is more like it. He is improving. I see he has asked for a lot of things for a friend of his named Johnny. Johnny Stout —who is he? It seems to me I hardly remember him or where he lives."

"Yes," said Johnny, stepping up. "That's me. He gave me a sled, too, and he made it himself." Santa Claus turned and looked at him and his expression turned to a smile; in fact, Tommy thought he really winked at Johnny.

"Oh, I know that sled. It was a pretty good sled, too," he said.

This gave Tommy courage, and he stepped forward, and said, "He lives in a little bit of a house near our place—just that way—" He turned and pointed. "I'll show it to you when you come."

"Good," said Santa Claus. "I'll show it to you and you show it to me. We are

apt to overlook those little houses. So you are Tommy Trot?" he said. "Glad to see you," and he turned and held out his hand to Tommy. "I sent my reindeer to fetch you and I am glad you made that sled, for it is only a sled made for others that can get up here. You see, everything here, except the North Pole, is made for some one else, and that's the reason we have such a good time up here. If you like, I'll take you around and show you and Johnny our shops." This was exactly what Tommy wanted, so he thanked him politely.

"I'll be back in a little while," said Santa Claus to the lady, "for as soon as the boys are all asleep I must set out. I have a great many stockings to fill this year. See that everything is ready. Come along, boys," and next minute they were going through room after room and shop after shop, filled with so many things that Tom-

my could not keep them straight in his mind. He wondered how any one could have thought of so many things, except his mother, of course; she always thought of everything for every one. Some of them he wished for, but every time he thought of wanting a thing for himself the lights got dim, so that he stopped thinking about himself at all, and turned to speak to Johnny, but he was gone.

Presently Santa Claus said: "These are just my stores. Now we will go and see where some of these things are made." He gave a whistle, and the next second up dashed a sled with a team of reindeer in it, and who was there holding the reins but Johnny, with his little cap perched on the top of his head! At Tommy's surprise Santa Claus gave a laugh that made him shake all over like a bowl full of jelly, quite as Tommy had read he did in a poem he

had learned the Christmas before, called "The Night Before Christmas, when all through the house."

"That comes of knowing how to drive goats," said Santa Claus. "Johnny knows a lot and I am going to give him a job, because he works so hard," and with that Tommy's boots suddenly jumped him into the sled, and Santa Claus stepped in behind him and pulled up a big robe over them.

"Here goes," he said, and at the word they turned the corner, and there was a gate of ice that looked like the mirrored doors in Tommy's mother's room, which opened before them, and they dashed along between great piles of things, throwing them on both sides like snow from a sled-runner, and before Tommy knew it they were gliding along a road, which Tommy felt he had seen somewhere before, though he could not

remember where. The houses on the roadside did not seem to have any front-walls at all, and everywhere the people within were working like beavers; some sewing, some cutting out, some sawing and hammering, all making something, all laughing or smiling. They were mostly dressed like grown-up people, but when they turned their faces they all looked young. Tommy was wondering why this was, when Santa Claus said that was because they were "Working for others. They grow young every Christmas. This is Christmas Land and Kindness Town." They turned another corner and were whisking by a little house, inside of which was some one sewing for dear life on a jacket. Tommy knew the place by the little backyard.

"Stop, stop!" he cried, pointing. "That's Johnny's home and that's Johnny's mother sewing. She's laughing. I expect she's making that for Johnny."

"Where?" asked Santa Claus, turning. Tommy pointed back, "There, there!" but they had whisked around a corner.

"I was so busy looking at that big house that I did not see it," said Santa Claus.

"That's our house," said Tommy. "I tell you what," he said presently, "if I get anything—I'll give him some." Santa Claus smiled.

So they dashed along, making all sorts of turns and curves, through streets lined with shops full of Christmas things and thronged with people hurrying along with their arms full of bundles; out again into the open; by little houses half buried in snow, with a light shining dimly through their upper windows; on through forests of Christmas trees, hung with toys and not yet lighted, and presently in a wink were again at Santa Claus's home, in a great hall. All along the sides were cases filled with all

sorts of toys, guns, uniforms, sleds, skates, snow-shoes, fur gloves, fur coats, books, toy-dogs, ponies, goats, cows, everything.

III

TOMMY was just thinking how he would love to carry his mother a polar bearskin for his father, and his father a sealskin coat for his mother, when Santa Claus came up behind him and tweaked his ear.

"Ah!" he said, "so you want something —something you can't get?"

"Not for myself," said Tommy, shamefacedly.

"So," said Santa Claus, with a look much like Tommy's father when he was pleased. "I know that. They don't have them exactly about here. The teddy-bears drove them out. You have to go away off to find them." He waved his hand to show how far off it was.

"I should like to hunt them, if I only

had a gun!" said Tommy;—"and one for Johnny, too," he added quickly.

Santa Claus winked again. "Well," he said slowly, just as Tommy's father always did when Tommy asked for something and he was considering—"well, I'll think about it." He walked up and touched a spring, and the glass door flew open. "Try these guns," he said; and Tommy tipped up and took one out. It however, seemed a little light to shoot polar bears with and he put it back and took another. That, however, was rather heavy.

"Try this," said Santa Claus, handing him one, and it was the very thing. "Load right; aim right; and shoot right," said he, "and you'll get your prize every time. And, above all, stand your ground."

"Now, if I only had some dogs!" thought Tommy, looking around at a case full of all sorts of animals; ponies and cows; and

dogs and cats; some big, some little, and some middle-sized. "I wish those were real dogs."

"Where's Sate?" asked Santa Claus.

"Sate can't pull a sled," said Tommy. "He's too little. Besides, he ain't an Eskimo dog—I mean he isn't," he corrected quickly, seeing Santa Claus look at him. "But he's awful bad after cats." Just then, to his horror, he saw Sate in the show-case with his eye on a big, white cat. He could hardly keep from crying out; but he called to him very quietly, "Come here, come here, Sate. Don't you hear me, sir? Come here."

He was just about to go up and seize him when Santa Claus said: "He's all right. He's just getting acquainted."

"My! how much he talks like Peake," thought Tommy. "I wonder if he is his uncle."

Just then Sate began to nose among some little brownish-gray dogs, and so Tommy called, "Here—come here—come along," and out walked not only Sate, but six other dogs, and stood in a line just as though they were hitched to a sled, the six finest Eskimo dogs Tommy had ever seen.

"Aren't they beauties!" said Santa Claus. "I never saw a finer lot; big-boned, broad-backed, husky fellows. They'll scale an ice-mountain like my reindeer. And if they ever get in sight of a bear!" He made a gesture as much as to say, "Let him look out."

"What are their names?" said Tommy, who always wanted to know every one's name.

"Buster and Muster and Fluster, and Joe and Rob and Mac."

"Ain't one of them named Towser?" asked Tommy. "I thought one was always named Towser."

"No, that's a book-name," said Santa Claus so scornfully that Tommy was sorry he had asked him, especially as he added, "Isn't, not ain't."

"But they haint any harness," said Tommy, using the word Peake always used,—"I mean, hisn't any—no, I mean haven't any harness. I wish I had some harness for them."

"Pooh! wishing doesn't do anything by itself," said Santa Claus.

"Oh! I tell you. I've a lot of string that came off some Christmas things my mother got for some poor people. I put it in my pocket to give it to Johnny to mend his goat-harness with, and I never thought of it when I saw him last night."

"So," said Santa Claus. "That's better. Let's see it."

Tommy felt in his pocket, and at first he could not find it. "I've lost it," he said sorrowfully.

"Try again," said Santa Claus.

Tommy felt again in a careless sort of way.

"No, I've lost it," he said. "It must have dropped out."

"You're always losing something," said Santa Claus. "Now, Johnny would have used that. You are sure you had it?"

Tommy nodded. "Sure; I put it right in this pocket."

"Then you've got it now. Feel in your other pockets."

"I've felt there two times," said Tommy.

"Then feel again," said Santa Claus. And Tommy felt again, and sure enough, there it was. He pulled it out, and as it came it turned to harness—six sets of wonderful dog-harness, made of curious leather-thongs, and on every breast-strap was the name of the dog.

As Tommy made a dive for it and began to put the harness on the dogs, Santa Claus

said, "String on bundles bought for others sometimes comes in quite handy."

Even then Tommy did not know how to put the harness on the dogs. As fast as he got it on one, Sate would begin to play with him and he would get all tangled up in it. Tommy could have cried with shame, but he remembered what his father had told him about "Trying instead of crying"; so he kept on, and the first thing he knew they were all harnessed. Just then he heard a noise behind him and there was Johnny with another team of dogs just like his, hitched to his box-sled, on which they had come, and on it a great pile of things tied, and in his hand a list of what he had—food of all kinds in little cans; bread and butter, and even cake, like that he had given away; dried beef; pemmican; coffee and tea, all put up in little cases; cooking utensils; a frying-pan and a coffee-pot and a few other

things—tin cups and so forth; knives and everything that he had read that boys had when they went camping; matches and a flint-stone in a box with tinder, in case the matches gave out or got wet; hatchets and saws and tools to make ice-houses or to mend their sleds with: in fact, everything that Tommy's father had ever told him men used when they went into the woods. And on top of all, in cases, was the ammunition they would need.

"Now, if we had a tent," said Johnny. But Santa Claus said, "You don't need tents up there."

"I know," said Tommy. "You sleep in bags made of skin or in houses made of snow."

Santa Claus gave Johnny a wink. "That boy is improving," he said. "He knows some things"; and with that he took out of the case and gave both Tommy and

Johnny big heavy coats of whitish fur and two bags made of skin. "And now," he said, "you will have to be off if you want to get back here before I leave, for though the night is very long, I must be getting away soon," and all of a sudden the door opened and there was the North Star straight ahead, and at a whistle from Santa Claus away went the dogs, one sled right behind the other, and Sate, galloping for life and barking with joy, alongside.

The last thing Tommy heard Santa Claus say was, "Load right, aim right, and shoot right; and stand your ground."

In a short time they were out of the light of the buildings and on a great treeless waste of snow and ice, much rougher than anything Tommy had ever seen; where it was almost dark and the ice seemed to turn up on edge. They had to work their way along slowly between jagged ice-peaks, and

sometimes they came to places which it seemed they could never get over, but by dint of pushing and hauling and pulling, they always got over in the end. The first meal they took was only a bite, because they did not want to waste time, and they were soon on their sleds again, dashing along, and Tommy was glad, when, after some hours of hard work, Johnny said he thought they had better turn in, as in a few hours they ought to be where Santa Claus had told them they could find polar bears, and they ought to be fresh when they struck their tracks. They set to work, unhitched the dogs, untied the packs and got out their camp-outfit, and having dug a great hole in the snow behind an ice-peak, where the wind did not blow so hard, and having gathered some dry wood, which seemed to have been caught in the ice as if on purpose for them, they lit a fire, and getting out

their frying-pan they stuck two chops on sticks and toasted them, and had the best supper Tommy had ever eaten. The bones they gave to the dogs. Johnny suggested tying up the dogs, but Tommy was so sleepy, he said: "Oh, no, they won't go away. Besides, suppose a bear should come while we are asleep." They took their guns so as to be ready in case a polar bear should come nosing around, and each one crawled into his bag and was soon fast asleep, Sate having crawled into Tommy's bag with him and snuggled up close to keep him warm.

It seemed to Tommy only a minute before he heard Johnny calling, and he crawled out to find him looking around in dismay. Every dog had disappeared except Sate.

"We are lost!" said Johnny. "We must try to get back or we shall freeze to death." He climbed up on top of an ice-peak and looked around in every direction; but not

a dog was in sight. "We must hurry up," he said, "and go back after them. Why didn't we tie them last night! We must take something to eat with us." So they set to work and got out of the bag all they could carry, and with their guns and ammunition were about to start back.

"We must hide the rest of the things in a cache," said Tommy, "so that if we ever come back we may find them."

"What's a cache?" said Johnny.

Tommy was proud that he knew something Johnny did not know. He explained that a "cache" was a hiding-place.

So they put the things back in the bag and covered them up with snow, and Tommy, taking up his gun and pack, gave a whistle to Sate, who was nosing around. Suddenly the snow around began to move, and out from under the snow appeared first the head of one dog and then of another,

until every one—Buster and Muster and Fluster and the rest—had come up and stood shaking himself to get the snow out of his coat. Then Tommy remembered that his father had told him that that was the way the Eskimo dogs often kept themselves warm when they slept, by boring down deep in the snow. Never were two boys more delighted. In a jiffy they had uncovered the sled, eaten breakfast, fed the dogs and hitched them up again, and were once more on their way. They had not gone far, though it seemed to Tommy a long, long way, when the ice in the distance seemed to Tommy to turn to great mountain-like icebergs. "That's where they are," said Tommy. "They are always on icebergs in the pictures." Feeling sure that they must be near them, they tied their dogs to the biggest blocks of ice they could find, and even tied Sate, and taking each

his gun and a bag of extra ammunition, they started forward on foot. As Tommy's ammunition was very heavy, he was glad when Johnny offered to carry it for him. Even so, they had not gone very far, though it seemed far enough to Tommy, when he proposed turning back and getting something to eat. As they turned they lost the North Star, and when they looked for it again they could not tell which it was. Johnny thought it was one, Tommy was sure it was another. So they tried first one and then the other, and finally gave themselves up as lost. They went supperless to bed that night or rather that time, and Tommy never wished himself in bed at home so much, or said his prayers harder, or prayed for the poor more earnestly. They were soon up again and were working along through the ice-peaks, growing hungrier and hungrier, when, going over a rise

of ice, they saw not far off a little black dot on the snow which they thought might be bear or seal. With gun in hand they crept along slowly and watchfully, and soon they got close enough to see that there was a little man, an Eskimo, armed with a spear and bow and arrows and with four or five dogs and a rough little sled, something like Johnny's sled, but with runners made of frozen salmon. At first he appeared rather afraid of them, but they soon made signs to him that they were friends and were lost and very hungry. With a grin which showed his white teeth he pointed to his runners, and borrowing Tommy's knife, he clipped a piece off of them for each of them and handed it back with the knife; Tommy knew that he ought not to eat with his knife, but he was so hungry that he thought it would be overlooked. Having breakfasted on frozen runner, they

were fortunate enough to make the Eskimo understand that they wanted to find a polar bear. He made signs to them to follow him and he would guide them where they would find one. "Can you shoot?" he asked, making a sign with his bow and arrow.

"Can we shoot!" laughed both Tommy and Johnny. "Watch us. See that big green piece of ice there?" They pointed at an ice-peak near by. "Well, watch us!" And first Johnny and then Tommy blazed away at it, and the way the icicles came clattering down satisfied them. They wished all that trip that the ice-peak had been a bear. So they followed him, and a great guide he was. He showed them how to avoid the rough places in the ice-fields, and, in fact, seemed quite as much at home in that waste of ice and snow as Johnny was back in town.

He always kept near the coast, he said, as he could find both bear and seal there. They had reached a very rough place, when, as they were going along, he stopped suddenly and pointed far off across the ice. Neither Tommy nor Johnny could see anything except ice and snow, try as they might. But they understood from his excitement that somewhere in the distance was a seal or possibly even a polar bear and, gun in hand, with beating hearts, they followed him as he stole carefully through the ice-peaks, working his way along, and every now and then cautioning them to stoop so as not to be seen.

So they crept along until they reached the foot of a high ridge of ice piled up below a long ledge of black rock which seemed to rise out of the frozen sea. Up this they worked their way, stooping low, the guide in front, clutching his bow and arrow,

Johnny next, clutching his gun, and Tommy behind, clutching his, each treading in the other's tracks. Suddenly, as he neared the top, the guide dropped flat on the snow. Johnny followed his example and Tommy did the same. They knew that they must be close to the bear and they held their breath; for the guide, having examined his bow and arrows carefully, began to wriggle along on his stomach. Johnny and Tommy wriggled along behind him, clutching their guns. Just at the top of the ledge the guide quietly slipped an arrow out of his quiver and held it in his hand, as he slowly raised his head and peeped over. Johnny and Tommy, guns in hand, crept up beside him to peep also. At that instant, however, before Tommy could see anything, the guide sprang to his feet. "Whiz," by Tommy's ear went an arrow at a great white object towering above them at the entrance of

what seemed a sort of cave, and two more arrows followed it, whizzing by his ear so quickly that they were all three sticking in deep before Tommy took in that the object was a great white polar bear, with his head turned from them, in the act of going in the cave. As the arrows struck him, he twisted himself and bit savagely at them, breaking off all but one, which was lodged back of his shoulder. As he reared up on his hind legs and tried to get at this arrow, he seemed to Tommy as high as the great wardrobe at home. Tommy, however, had no time to do much thinking, for in twisting around the bear caught sight of them. As he turned toward them, the guide with a yell that sounded like "Look out!" dodged behind, but both Tommy and Johnny threw up their guns and pulled the trigger. What was their horror to find that they both had forgotten to load their guns

after showing the guide how they could shoot. The next second, with jaws wide open, the bear made a dash for them. Tommy's heart leapt into his throat. He glanced around to see if he could run and climb a tree, for he knew that grizzlies could not climb, and he hoped that polar bears could not climb either, while Tommy prided himself on climbing and had often climbed the apple-tree in the pasture at home; but there was not a tree or a shrub in sight, and all he saw was the little guide running for life and disappearing behind an ice-peak.

"Run, Johnny!" cried Tommy, and, "Run, Tommy!" cried Johnny at the same moment. But they had no time to run, for the next second the bear was upon them, his eyes glaring, his great teeth gleaming, his huge jaws wide open, from which came a growl that shook the ice under their feet.

As the bear sprang for them Johnny was more directly in his way, but, happily, his foot slipped from under him and he fell flat on his back just as the bear lit, or he would have been crushed instantly. Even as it was, he was stunned and lay quite still under the bear, which for the moment seemed to be dazed. Either he could not tell what had become of Johnny, or else he could not make up his mind whether to eat Johnny up at once or to leave him and catch Tommy first and then eat them both together. He seemed to decide on the latter, for, standing up, he fixed his eyes on Tommy and took a step across Johnny's prostrate body, with his mouth open wider than before, his eyes glaring more fiercely, and with a roar and a growl that made the ice-peaks shed a shower of icicles. Then it was that Tommy seemed to have become a different boy. In fact, no sooner had

Johnny gone down than Tommy forgot all about himself and his own safety, and thought only of Johnny and how he could save him. And, oh, how sorry he was that he had let Johnny carry all the ammunition, even though it was heavy! For his gun was empty and Johnny had every cartridge. Tommy was never so scared in all his life. He tried to cry out, but his throat was parched, so he began to say his prayers, and remembering what Santa Claus had said about boys who asked only for themselves, he tried to pray for Johnny.

At this moment happened what appeared almost a miracle. By Tommy dashed a little hairy ball and flew at the bear like a tiger; and there was Sate, a part of his rope still about his neck, clinging to the bear for life. The bear deliberately stopped and looked around as if he were too surprised to move; but Sate's teeth were in

him, and then the efforts of the bear to catch him were really funny. He snapped and snarled and snarled and snapped; but Sate was artful enough to dodge him, and the bear's huge paws simply beat the air and knocked up the snow. Do what he might, he could not touch Sate. Finally the bear did what bears always do when bees settle on them when they are robbing their hives—he began to roll over and over, and the more he rolled the more he tied himself up in the rope around Sate. As he rolled away from Johnny, Tommy dashed forward and picked up Johnny's gun, coolly loaded it, loading it right, too, and, springing forward, raised the gun to his shoulder. The bear, however, rolled so rapidly that Tommy was afraid he might shoot Sate, and, before he could fire, the bear, with Sate still clinging to him, rolled inside the mouth of the cave. Tommy was in de-

spair. At this moment, however, he heard a sound, and there was Johnny just getting on his feet. He had never been so glad to see any one.

"Where is the bear?" asked Johnny, looking around, still a little dazed. Tommy pointed to the cave.

"In there, with Sate tied to him."

"We must save him," said Johnny.

Carefully dividing the ammunition now, both boys loaded their guns, and hurrying down the icy slope, carefully approached the mouth of the cave, guns in hand, in case the bear should appear.

Inside it was so dark that they could at first see nothing, but they could hear the sound of the struggle going on between Sate and the bear. Suddenly Sate changed his note and gave a little cry as of pain. At the sound of his distress Tommy forgot himself.

"Follow me!" he cried. "He is choking!" and not waiting even to look behind to see whether Johnny was with him, he dashed forward into the cave, gun in hand, thinking only to save Sate. Stumbling and slipping, he kept on, and turning a corner, there, right in front of him, were the two eyes of the bear, glaring in the darkness like coals of fire. Pushing boldly up and aiming straight between the two eyes, Tommy pulled the trigger. With a growl which mingled with the sound of the gun, the bear made a spring for him and fell right at his feet, rolled up in a great ball. Happily for Sate, he lit just on top of the ball. Tommy whipped out his knife and cut the cord from about Sate's throat, and had him in his arms when Johnny came up.

The next thing was to skin the bear, and this the boys expected to find as hard work as ever even Johnny had done; but, fortu-

nately, the bear had been so surprised at Tommy's courage and skill in aiming that when the bullet hit him he had almost jumped out of his skin. So, after they had worked a little while, the skin came off quite easily. What surprised Johnny was that it was all tanned, but Tommy had always rather thought that bears wore their skin tanned on the inside and lined, too. The next thing was to have a dinner of bear-meat, for, as Tommy well remembered, all bear-hunters ate bear-steaks. They were about to go down to the shore to hunt along for driftwood, when, their eyes becoming accustomed to the darkness, they found a pile of wood in the corner of the cave, which satisfied them that at some time in the past this cave had been used by robbers or pirates, who probably had been driven away by this great bear, or possibly might even have been eaten up by him.

At first they had some little difficulty in making a fire, as their matches, warranted water-proof, had all got damp when Tommy fell into the water—an incident I forgot to mention; but after trying and trying, the tinder caught from the flint and they quickly had a fine fire crackling in a corner of the cave, and here they cooked bear-steak and had the finest dinner they had had since they came into the Arctic Regions. They were just thinking of going after the dogs and the sleds, when up came the dogs dragging the sleds behind them, and without a word, pitched in to make a hearty meal of bear-meat themselves. It seemed as if they had got a whiff of the fresh steak and pulled the sleds loose from the ice points to which they were fastened. They were not, however, allowed to eat in any peace until they had all recognized that Sate was the hero of this bear fight,

for he gave himself as many airs as though he had not only got the bear, but had shot and skinned it.

It was at this moment that the Eskimo guide came back, jabbering with delight, and with his white teeth shining, just as if he had been as brave as Sate. At first, Tommy and Johnny were inclined to be very cold to him and pointed their fingers at him as a coward, but when he said he had only one arrow left and had wanted that to get a sealskin coat for Tommy's mother, and, as he had the sealskin coat, they could not contradict him, but graciously gave him, in exchange for the coat, the bear-meat which the dogs had not eaten.

Having packed everything on the sled carefully, with the sealskin coat on top of the pack and the bear's fur on top of that, and having bid their Eskimo friend good-by, they turned their backs on the North Pole and struck out for home.

They had hardly started, however, when the sound of sleigh-bells reached them, coming from far over the snow, and before they could tell where it was, who should appear, sailing along over the ice-peaks, but Santa Claus himself, in his own sleigh, all packed with Christmas things, his eight reindeer shining in the moonlight and his bells jingling merrily. Such a shout as he gave when he found that they had actually got the bear and had the robe to show for it! It did them good; and both Tommy and Johnny vied with each other in telling what the other had done. Santa Claus was so pleased that he made them both get in his sleigh to tell him about it. He let Sate get in too, and snuggle down right at their feet. Johnny's box-sled he hitched on behind. The dogs were turned loose. At first Tommy feared they might get lost, but Santa Claus said they would soon find their way home.

"In fact," he said with a wink, "you have not been so far away as you think. Now tell me all about it," he said. So Tommy began to tell him, beginning at the very beginning when Johnny took him on his sled. But he had only got as far as the sofa, when he fell asleep, and he never knew how he got back home. When he waked up he was in bed.

He never could recall exactly what happened. Afterwards he recalled Santa Claus saying to him, "You must show me where Johnny lives, for I'm afraid I forgot him last Christmas." Then he remembered that once he heard Santa Claus calling to him in a whisper, "Tommy Trot, Tommy Trot," and though he was very sleepy he raised himself up to find Santa Claus standing up in the sled in Johnny's backyard, with Johnny fast asleep in his arms; and

that Santa Claus said to him, "I want to put Johnny in bed without waking him up, and I want you to follow me, and put these things which I have piled up here on the sled you made for him, in his stocking by the fire." He remembered that at a whistle to the deer they sprang with a bound to the roof, the sled sailing behind them; but how he got down he never could recall, and he never knew how he got back home.

When he waked next morning there was the polar bearskin which he and Johnny had brought back with them, not to mention the sealskin coat, and though Johnny, when he next saw him, was too much excited at first by his new sled and the fine fresh cow which his mother had found in her cow-house that morning to talk about anything else, yet, when he and his mother came over after breakfast to see Tommy's father and thank him for something, they

said that Santa Claus had paid them a visit such as he never had paid before, and they brought with them Johnny's goats, which they insisted on giving Tommy as a Christmas present. So Tommy Trot knew that Santa Claus had got his letter.

A CAPTURED SANTA CLAUS

A CAPTURED SANTA CLAUS

I

CHRISTMAS AT HOLLY HILL

HOLLY HILL was a place for Christmas! Holly Hill, the old rambling Stratford homestead in Virginia, on its high hill, looking down the long slope and across the wide fields to the far woods rimming the sky. From Bob, the veteran, within a month of his teens, down to brown-eyed Evelyn, with her golden hair floating all around her, when Christmas came everyone hung up a stocking, and the visit of Santa Claus was the event of the year.

They went to sleep the night before Christmas—or rather they went to bed, for

sleep was long far from their bright eyes—with delightful expectations and thrills along their backs, and with little squeakings and gurglings, like so many little white mice, and if Santa Claus had not always been so very prompt in disappearing up the chimney before daybreak he must certainly have been caught. For by the time the chickens were crowing in the morning there would be an answering twitter through the house, and with a patter of little feet and subdued laughter small, white-clad figures would steal through the dim light of dusky rooms and cold passages, opening doors with sudden bursts, and shouting "Christmas gift!" into darkened chambers, at still sleeping elders. Then they would scurry away in the gray light to rake open the hickory embers and revel in the exploration of their bulging, overcrowded stockings. Not Columbus was to be envied when those

discoveries were being made. What was a new world to those treasures! The thrill of the new jack-knife remains after forty years—it had four blades, each worth a province. Envy Columbus? Perish the thought!

Such was Christmas morning at Holly Hill in the old times before the war—those times of Memory and Romance.

Thus it was that at Christmas, 1863, when the blockading lines were drawn close and there were no new toys to be had for love or money, there were much disappointment and some murmurs at Holly Hill. The children had never really felt the war until then, though their father, Major Stafford, had been off, first with his company and then with his regiment, since April, 1861. War was on the whole a pleasant experience to the boys—so many strangers came by. Battles were so inter-

esting, and there was a bare chance of their seeing one, in which Bob was to lead a charge and capture the commanding General.

But when Christmas came and there were no presents, no "real" presents, war was realized. It was a terrible thing. From Mrs. Stafford down to little tot Evelyn there was an absence of the merriment which Christmas always brought with it. The children's mother had done all she could to collect such presents as were within her reach, but the youngsters were much too sharp not to know that the presents were "just fixed up"; and when they were all gathered around the fire in their mother's chamber that Christmas morning, looking over their presents, their little faces wore an expression of pathetic disappointment.

"I don't think much of *this* Christmas," announced freckled Ran, with characteristic gravity, looking down on his poor presents

with an air of contempt. "A hatchet, a lot of old nails, and a hare-trap aren't much."

Mrs. Stafford smiled, but the smile soon died away into an expression of sadness.

"I too have to do without my Christmas gift," she said. "Your father wrote me that he hoped to spend Christmas with us, and he has not come. He has been ordered over to the Potomac."

"Never mind; he may come yet," said Bob encouragingly. "He always does what he says he's going to do." (Bob always was encouraging. That was why he was "Old Bob.") "An axe was just the thing I wanted, mamma," said he, shouldering his new possession proudly and striking the attitude of a woodman striding off. "Now I can make an abatis."

Mrs. Stafford's face lit up again. He was a sturdy boy, with wide-open eyes and a good mouth.

"And a hatchet was what I wanted," admitted Ran, affected by the example. "Besides, there are a lot of nails—now I can make my own hare-traps."

"An' I like a broked knife," asserted Charlie, stoutly, falling valiantly into the general movement, while Evelyn pushed her long hair out of her eyes, and hugged her patched-up baby, declaring:

"I love my dolly, and I love Santa Tlaus, an' I love my papa," at which her mother took the little midget to her bosom, broken doll and all, and hid her face in her tangled curls.

II

MAJOR STAFFORD COMES HOME

THE end of that Christmas was better than the beginning. Major Stafford justified Bob's confidence. The holiday was not quite over when one evening Major Stafford galloped up to the gate through the mist, his black horse, Ajax, splashed with mud to his ear-tips. He had ridden him seventy miles that day to keep that tryst. The Major soon heard all about the little ones' disappointment at not receiving any new presents.

"Santa Tlaus didn' tum this Trismas, but he's tummin' *next* Trismas," said Evelyn, looking wisely up at him, that evening, from the rug, where she was vainly trying to

make her doll's head stick on her broken shoulders.

"And why did he not come this Christmas, Miss Wisdom?" laughed her father, touching her caressingly with the toe of his boot.

"Tause the Yankees wouldn't let him," said she, gravely, holding her doll up and looking at it pensively, her head on one side.

"And why, then, should he come next year?"

"Taus God's goin' to make him." She turned the mutilated baby around and examined it gravely, with her shining head still set on the other side.

"There's faith for you," said Mrs. Stafford.

Her husband asked the child:

"How do you know this?"

"Tause God told me," answered Evelyn, still busy with her inspection.

"He did? When?"

"'Tother night when I saw him."

"You saw him!"

"Um—hm"—nodding her head cheerfully.

"Well! I knew she was an angel," said Major Stafford in an aside to his wife; "but —What did He say Santa Claus is going to bring you?" he asked.

The little mite sprang to her feet. "He's goin' to bring me—a—great—big—dolly —with real, sure-'nough hair, and blue eyes that will go to sleep, and her name's Miss Please-Ma'am." Her face was aglow, and she stretched her plump hands wide apart to give the size.

"She has dreamt it," said the Major in an undertone to her mother. "There is not such a doll as that in the Southern Confederacy."

The child caught his meaning. "Yes,

He *is*," she insisted, "'cause I asked Him an' He said he would; and Charlie——"

Just then that youngster burst into the room, a small whirlwind in petticoats. As soon as his cyclonic tendencies could be curbed his father asked him:

"Well, what did you ask Santa Claus for, young man?"

"For a pair of breeches and a sword," answered the boy promptly, striking an attitude. "And I'm going to have 'em. I told Him I just had to have 'em."

"Well, upon my word!" laughed his father, eyeing the erect little figure and the steady, clear eyes which looked proudly up at him. "I had no idea what a young Achilles we had here. You shall have them."

The boy nodded gravely. "All right. When I get to be a man I won't let anybody make my mamma cry." He advanced

a step, with head up, the very picture of spirit.

"Ah! you won't?" said his father, with a gesture to prevent his wife interrupting.

"Nor my little sister," said the young warrior, patronizingly, swelling with infantile importance.

"No; he won't let anybody make *me* ky," chimed in Evelyn, promptly accepting the proffered protection. "And he won't make me ky himself."

"But you mus'n't be a cry-baby," demanded Charlie.

"On my word, Ellen, the fellow has some of the old blood in him," said Major Stafford, laughing, much pleased. "Come here, my young knight." He drew the boy up to him and stood him before him. "I had rather have heard you say that than have won a brigadier's wreath. You shall have your breeches and your sword next

Christmas if I live. Were I the king I should give you your spurs. Remember, never let any one make your mother or sister cry."

Charlie nodded in token of his acceptance of the condition.

"All right. But she mus'n't be a cry-baby," he added with a glance down at Evelyn.

III

MAJOR STAFFORD GETS THE CHRISTMAS PRESENTS

WHEN Major Stafford galloped away next day, on his return to his command, the little group at the lawn-gate shouted many messages after him. The last thing he heard was Charlie's treble, as he seated himself on the gate-post, calling to him not to forget to make Santa Claus bring him a pair of uniform breeches and a sword; and Evelyn's little voice came to him long after he could distinguish the words but he knew she was reminding him of her "dolly that can go to sleep."

Many times during the ensuing year, amid the hardships of the campaign, the

privations and the fatigues of the march and the dangers of battle, the Major heard those little voices calling to him.

In the autumn he won the three stars of a Colonel for gallantry in leading a desperate charge on a town in the heart of the enemy's land. A perilous raid had been made deep into the country. An overwhelming force had been met which defeated the object of the raid, and threatened the destruction of the entire force. The day was saved by Major Stafford. But none knew, when he dashed into the town at the head of his regiment, under a hail of bullets, that his mind was full of toyshops and clothing-stores, and that when he was so stoutly holding his position he was guarding a little boy's suit, a small sword with a gilded scabbard, and a large doll with flowing ringlets and blue eyes that could "go to sleep."

Some of his friends during that year

charged the Major with growing miserly, and rallied him upon hoarding up his pay and carrying large rolls of Confederate money about his person; and when, just before the raid, he invested his entire year's pay in four or five ten-dollar gold-pieces, they vowed he was mad.

"I shall report him as a hopeless case," said Dr. Graham, the Surgeon. "A man might have reason to do this in time of peace; but when a man hoards money on his person and then exposes himself as the Major does every time we have a battle, it's proof of insanity."

The Major, however, always met these charges with a smile.

"Doctors are like other men," he said. "They think whatever they cannot understand, madness." And as soon as his position was assured in the captured town he proved his sanity.

A CAPTURED SANTA CLAUS

The fight had been a sharp one, and the town had only been seized after a desperate charge. The shopkeepers had put up their shutters and were barricaded within their houses, while bullets were hailing and light field-pieces were cracking. At length it grew quiet.

The owner of a handsome store on the principal street, over which was a large sign, "Men's and Boys' Clothes," peeping out, saw a Confederate major ride up to the door, which had been hastily fastened when the fight began, and rap on it with the handle of his sword. There was something in the rap that was imperative, and the owner hastily opened the door. The officer entered.

"Good evening." He looked all about him. "Ah!" He picked up a little uniform suit of blue cloth with brass buttons.

"You have no gray ones?" he asked with a smile.

"No, sir. No use for 'em."

"What is the price of this?"

"Ten dollars," stammered the shopkeeper. "But you can have it for nothing if you will keep your men from troubling me."

To his astonishment, the Confederate officer put his hand in his pocket and laid a ten-dollar gold piece on the counter.

"Now show me where there is a toy-shop."

There was one only a few doors off, and the shopkeeper was most eager to show it. But the officer said he could find it. He went out.

The Major found and selected a boy's sword handsomely ornamented, and the most beautiful doll, over whose eyes stole the whitest of roseleaf eyelids, and which

could talk as dolls talk, and do other wonderful things. He astonished this shopkeeper also by laying down another gold-piece. This left him but two or three more of the proceeds of his year's pay, and these he soon handed over a counter to a jeweller, who gave him a small package in exchange. He smiled and chatted so pleasantly with the men that when he left the shopkeepers all had new ideas of at least one "Rebel" officer.

All during the remainder of the campaign Colonel Stafford carried a package carefully sealed and strapped on behind his saddle. His care of it and his secrecy about it were the subjects of many jests among his friends in the brigade, and when in an engagement his horse was shot, and the Colonel, under a hot fire, stopped and calmly unbuckled his bundle, and during the rest of the fight carried it in his hand,

there was a clamor afterward that he should disclose the contents. Even an offer to sing them a song would not appease his friends, though the Colonel had the best voice in the brigade. They must know his secret.

The brigade officers were gathered around a camp-fire that night on the edge of the bloody field. A Federal officer, Colonel Denby, who had been slightly wounded and captured in the fight, and who now sat somewhat grim and moody before the fire, was their guest.

"Now, Stafford, open the bundle and let us into the secret," they all said. "Some of us may get shot before we know it."

The Colonel, without a word, but with softened eyes, rose and, going to his saddle, which lay on the ground near by, brought the parcel to the fire. Kneeling down, he took out his knife and carefully opened the

outer cover of oil-skin. Many a jest was levelled at him across the blazing logs as he did so. But a smile was on his face, and the Federal colonel thought to himself what a fine, high-bred face it was.

One said the Colonel had turned pedler, and was trying to eke out a living by running the blockade on Lilliputian principles; another wagered that he had it full of Confederate bills; a third, that it was a talisman against bullets, and so on. Within the outer covering were several others; but at length the last was reached. As the Colonel ripped carefully, the group gathered around and bent breathlessly over him, the light from the blazing camp-fire shining ruddily on their eager, weather-tanned faces. When the Colonel put in his hand and drew out a toy sword, there was a general exclamation. But when he took the doll from her soft wrapping, and

then unrolled and held up a tiny jacket and a pair of little trousers not much larger than a man's hand, and just the size for a five-year-old boy, there was a dead silence and the men turned away their faces from the fire, and more than one who had boys of his own at home put his hand up to his eyes.

One of them, the bronzed and weather-beaten officer who had charged the Colonel with being a miser and who wore crepe on his sleeve, stretched himself out on the ground, flat on his face, and sobbed. As Colonel Stafford gently told his story of Charlie and Evelyn, even the grave face of Colonel Denby looked somewhat changed in the light of the fire, and he reached over for the doll.

"May I see it?"

"Certainly." A half dozen hands were stretched out to pass it to him. He handled it tenderly.

"I, too, have a little one at home," he said in a low voice, as he handed the doll back to Colonel Stafford. "The child of my only son. He was killed at Genies's Mill."

That night Colonel Stafford and Colonel Denby slept under the same blanket.

IV

THE BOYS LEARN SOMETHING OF WAR

DURING the whole year the children had been looking forward to the coming of Christmas. Charlie's outbursts of petulance and not rare fits of anger were invariably checked if any mention was made of his father's injunction to take care of his mother and little sister; and at length he became accustomed to curbing himself by the recollection of the charge he had received.

If he fell and hurt himself, even badly, in his constant attempts to climb up impossible places, he would simply snap his eyes and rub himself, and presently, say, proudly, "I don't cry now; I am a knight,

and next Christmas I am going to be a man, 'cause my papa's goin' to tell Santa Claus to bring me a pair of breeches and a sword." Evelyn could not help crying when she was hurt, for she was only a very little girl; but she added to her prayer of "God bless and keep my papa, and bring him safe home," the petition, "Please, God, bless and keep Santa Tlaus, and let him come here Trismas."

Old Bob and Ran, too, as well as the younger ones, looked forward eagerly to Christmas. But this year brought the war much closer to Holly Hill. Heretofore it had been to the children, even to Bob, something dim and distant, like a cloud on the horizon, with grumblings of thunder and sheet-lightning that threatened but did not strike. But now it swept up to Holly Hill like a storm, then like a flood rolled over it. The main armies passed along the

great road some way off, the Northern troops pushing on and on, nearer and nearer, until the big guns could be heard to the northward, making the ground tremble and the windows shake. At such times, Mrs. Stafford would stop and listen with white face and moving lips, and the older boys would stand beside her and count the reports in low tones, for they knew a great battle was being fought, and their father might be there. What would happen in case their side was beaten and had to fall back, they trembled to think. All the horses would be taken and the corn. That would mean starvation. And, perhaps, the house might be burnt. They had heard of such things elsewhere. And they might have to "refugee." This had its pleasant side for the boys, for they would have to travel south and, maybe, camp like gypsies or the "young marooners." Bob was full

of excitement as to this, and used to thrill Ran, telling how they would live, and how they would mount guard at night, and evade their pursuers—or sometimes make a stand against them, on a hill, or at a stream, throwing up their breastworks and holding them back with his gun while their mother and "the children" escaped.

Then they would go out to the stable and, seated on a manger, talk it all over with Uncle Saunders, the carriage-driver, who was guide, philosopher, and friend to them. Uncle Saunders would sometimes be consoling and sometimes almost disappointing.

"They wer'n't goin' refugeein' like a parcel of gypsies." (Uncle Saunders' ideas of camping-out were not orthodox.) "But 'tain't no danger: no Yankees could git to them. If they could, they'd 'a' been long ago," reasoned Uncle Saunders. And if a

few of "them pesky raiders slipt through and got there, he'd like to see 'em git *his* horses—he jist would. He knew a place he could hide 'em where they'd never find 'em. Gab'rull could hardly find 'em when he comes to blow his horn."

This, at least, was exciting, and Bob was all ears. He seized the old driver by the arm.

"Where is it, Uncle Saunders? You'll tell *me?* Please. I won't tell a soul—not even Ran. You know I won't if I promise."

But no; Uncle Saunders shut up like a clam—as tight as the high-barn door.

"Well, if I guess, will you tell me? Give me three guesses: all right? Is it the thick pines the other side of the creek where the old mine used to be?"

Uncle Saunders shook his head.

"Well, is it the big marsh with the high willows, and the old wagon-track?"

"You know, boy, I ain't goin' to teck my horses—my Black George and Blifil into dat mash!"

"Well—? (strung out very long). Is it—? Let me see—I've got only one more guess—haven't I?"

"I ain't give you nothin'," said Uncle Saunders, disappointingly. "You jist guessin' around heah."

But Bob insisted that by letting him guess twice he had agreed to the plan; and, in fact, it did look so.

"Well, go on, den," said Uncle Saunders at last.

Bob, after long thought, began again, guilefully watching Uncle Saunders' oracular face to read his success or failure by his expression. "Well—is it? No, it isn't that. Is it—the deep—? No; I don't want to ask that, I know it is not that— Is it the great woods?" (This with a jump.)

Old Saunders started to shake his head, and then looked around so guilefully to see that nobody was in ear-shot, that Bob dropped his voice to its most mysterious tone as he whispered, "Is that it?"

It may be doubted whether Uncle Saunders, for all his apparent confiding of his secret to Bob, was not playing a game with him, and merely letting him suppose he had guessed his secret refuge. But, however this was, and however clever he was at acting, Uncle Saunders was not clever enough to foretell the future. One morning, as Uncle Saunders was on his way to the stable, a party of men came galloping up the hill from toward the river, and in ten minutes all Uncle Saunders' plans were overthrown, and his horses, his cherished friends, were being led away amid his reproaches and the lamentations of the boys.

"Sam, you'll have to get up earlier in

the morning than this to get ahead of us," laughed one of the men.

"Dat ain't my name," said Uncle Saunders, curtly.

"You think so much of your horses, you'd better come along and attend to them. We'll pay you wages and set you free." Uncle Saunders shook his head.

"Nor, I'm goin' to stay right heah and teck keer o' my mistis and de chillern.—My master told me to teck keer ov 'em while he was away, and I'm goin' to stay heah till he comes back."

"You'll stay here till the war's over, then," said the blue-coat. "Your master, as you call him, will not be back here till then. We are going on to Richmond."

"You won't get there," said Bob with spirit. "You've been trying to get there for over three years and haven't done it."

"No, little Johnny, we haven't yet, but we're still on the way," said the soldier.

By breakfast-time the plantation had been completely overrun; and all that day the blue-clad troops were passing by.

It began to look after a little as if Bob's prediction were going to come true. The Union Armies did not reach Richmond. Their advance was stayed a few miles beyond Holly Hill. But Holly Hill and its family were well within the Federal lines, and there was no chance of being reached by any message or thing from the other side of the line. The roads, knee-deep in mud, were filled with troops in blue uniforms marching up and down, or with wagons passing backward and forward, piled high with boxes or forage. The children grew so used to them that they would go down to the roadside and watch them as they passed. The

only Confederates the children ever saw now were the dejected prisoners who were being passed back on their way to prison. The only news they ever received was the rumors which reached them from Federal sources. Mrs. Stafford's heart was heavy within her, and when a day or two before Christmas she heard Charlie and Evelyn, as they sat before the fire, gravely talking of the long-expected presents which their father had promised that Santa Claus should bring them, she could stand it no longer. She took Bob and Ran into her room, and there told them that, now as it was impossible for their father to come, they must help her entertain "the children" and console them for their disappointment. The two boys responded heartily, as true boys always will when thrown on their manliness.

"I knew he could not get here," said Ran.

"I knew no one else could; but papa," said Bob, "but I hoped he might. He can do so many things no one else can do."

Mrs. Stafford shook her head.

For the next two days Mrs. Stafford and both the boys were busy. Mrs. Stafford, when Charlie was not present, gave her time to cutting out and making a little gray uniform-suit from an old coat her husband had worn when he first entered the army; while the boys employed themselves, Bob in making a pretty little sword and scabbard out of an old piece of gutter, and Ran, who had a wonderful turn for carving, in carving a doll from a piece of hard-seasoned wood.

The day before Christmas the boys lost a little time in following and pitying a small lot of prisoners who passed along the road by the gate. They were always pitying the prisoners and planning means to rescue

them, for they had an idea that they suffered a terrible fate. Only one certain case had come to their knowledge. A young man had one day been carried by the Holly Hill gate on his way to the head-quarters of the officer in command of that portion of the lines, General Denby. He was in citizen's clothes, which were muddy and torn, and he was charged with being a spy. The guards with him looked grim. His face was white, and yet he was a fierce-looking young fellow, speaking scornfully to his guards. Bob and Ran returned to the house, full of excitement, and spent some time that night planning how they might rescue him. Their plan included no less than the capture of General Denby himself. Bob mapped it all out—how he would cross the creek, dodging the picket at the bridge, slip past the sentries, and walking into the farm-house where the General had his head

quarters, would seize him and force him to write a release of the prisoner.

The next morning, Ran, who had risen early to visit his hare-traps, rushed into his mother's room, white-faced and wide-eyed. "Oh! mamma!" he gasped, "they have hung him, just because he had on those clothes. Uncle Saunders heard all about it."

Mrs. Stafford, though she was much moved herself, endeavored to explain to the boy that this was one of the laws of war, but Ran's mind was not able to comprehend the principles which imposed so cruel a sentence for what he deemed so harmless a fault.

"It's that old General Denby!" he exclaimed, hotly. "Even his own soldiers say he works them to death. I wish somebody would capture him."

This act and some other measures of

severity gave General Denby a reputation for much harshness among the few old residents who yet remained at their homes within the lines, and the boys used to gaze at him furtively as he would ride by, grim and stern, followed by his staff. Yet there were those who said that General Denby's rigor was simply the result of a high standard of duty, and that at bottom he had a soft heart.

The children, however, could never bear to think of him, and when he would pass along with his staff, as he sometimes did, while they were watching beside the road, and would look at them with something very like a smile in his eyes, they would turn their heads away for fear he would speak to them.

V

THE SPY

THE approach of Christmas was marked even in the Federal camps, and many a song and ringing laugh were heard around the camp-fires glowing along the hills and in the tents and little cabins used as winter-quarters, over the boxes which were pouring in from home.

The troops in the camps near General Denby's head-quarters on Christmas Eve had been larking and frolicking all day like so many boys, preparing for the festivities of the evening, when they proposed to have a great entertainment; and the General, as he sat in the smoky front room in the old farm-house used as his head-quarters, writing official papers, had

more than once during the afternoon half-frowned at the noise and shouting outside. It disturbed him. A holiday occasion was not the easiest time for a general in command, especially when the enemy lay in force scarcely five miles away. The men were apt to think that at such a time discipline should be relaxed, and they be allowed to take it easy. And such an occasion was just the moment when his opponent, a general as watchful as he was able, was likely to make an attack. News had reached him through his scouts that such an attack was probable. Moreover, the General had been working all day answering despatches from men in Washington, telling him to do things that were either impossible or had been done long ago. And, to crown it all, the chimney smoked badly.

At length, however, late in the afternoon, he finished his work, and having dismissed

his Adjutant, he locked the door, and pushing aside all his business papers, took from his pocket a little letter and began to read.

As he read, the stern lines of the grim soldier's face relaxed, and more than once a smile stole into his eyes and stirred the corners of his grizzled mustache.

The letter was scrawled in a large, childish hand, and many of the words were interlined. It ran:

"My Dearest Grandpapa: I want to see you very much. I send you a Christmas gift. I made it all myself. I hope to get a whole lot of dolls and other presents. I love you. I send you all these kisses * * * * * * * * * * * *. You must kiss them every one. Don't I write well?

"Your loving little granddaughter,

"Lily."

When he had finished reading, the old veteran gravely lifted the letter to his lips and

pressed a kiss on each of the little spaces, so carefully drawn by the childish hand.

This done, he took out his handkerchief and blew his nose violently as he walked up and down the room. He even muttered something about "the fire smoking." Then he sat down once more at his table, and, placing the little letter before him, began to write. As he wrote, the fire smoked more than ever, and the sounds of revelry outside reached him in a perfect uproar; but he no longer frowned, and when the strains of "Dixie" came in faintly at the window, sung in a clear, rich, mellow solo, though for a moment he looked surprised, he sat back in his chair and listened.

"I wish I were in Dixie, away, away;
In Dixie's land I'll take my stand,
To live and die for Dixie land,
Away, away, away down South in Dixie!"

sang the voice, full and sonorous.

When the song ended, there was an outburst of applause, and shouts apparently demanding some other song, which was refused, for the noise grew to a tumult. The General rose and walked to the window. A large crowd had gathered about a campfire not far from his window, and in the midst, lifted up on a box, and clearly outlined against the firelight stood the singer, a tall, straight man with a long beard and civilian's clothes. Suddenly the uproar hushed, for the voice began again. But this time it was a hymn:

"While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
All seated on the ground,
The Angel of the Lord came down,
And glory shone around."

Verse after verse was sung, the men pouring out of their tents and huts to listen to the music.

"All glory be to God on high,
And to the earth be peace;
Good will henceforth from Heaven to men
Begin and never cease!"

"Begin and never cease," sang the singer to the end.

When the strain died away, there was dead silence for a little space, and then the talk began on a lower key.

The General stood for a moment, then turned from the window, finished his letter and sealed it. Carefully folding up the little sheet which lay before him, he replaced it in his pocket, and, going to the door, summoned the orderly who was just without.

"Mail that at once," he said.

"Yes, sir." The soldier saluted and turned to leave.

"By the way, who was that singing out there just now?—I mean that last one, who sang 'Dixie' and the hymn?"

"Only a pedler, sir, I believe."

The General's eyes fixed themselves on the soldier.

"Where did he come from?"

"I don't know, sir. Some of the boys had him singing."

"Tell Major Dayle to come here immediately," said the General.

In a moment the officer summoned entered, a stout, round-faced man, who looked as if he took the world easy. He appeared somewhat embarrassed.

"Who was this pedler?" asked the commander.

"I — I don't know ——" began the other.

"You don't know! Where did he come from?"

"From Colonel Watchley's camp—directly," said he, relieved to shift a part of the responsibility.

"How was he dressed?"

"In citizen's clothes."

"What did he have?"

"A pack—a few toys, and trinkets, and books."

"What was his name?"

"I did not hear it."

"And you let him go!" The General's eyes snapped.

"Yes, sir; I don't think——" he began.

"No, I know you don't," said the General. "Have I not given strict orders? He was a spy. Where has he gone?"

"I—I don't know. He cannot have gone far."

"Report yourself under arrest," said the commander, sternly.

The officer, after waiting a moment, walked off scowling. Walking to the door, the General said to the sentinel:

"Call the corporal, and tell him to request Captain Albert to come here immediately."

In a moment an alert, vigorous-looking young officer came up, and the General gave him an order.

"He must be found and not allowed to escape," he said in closing.

"Yes, sir: I'll find him," he said, as he hurried off.

Ten minutes later a small body of horsemen rode rapidly out of camp in the direction the pedler had taken. The picket at the bridge across the little stream below the camp had seen nothing of the pedler, and the men separated and began to visit the camps stretched along the slopes above the stream.

An hour or two later Captain Albert reported that he had traced the spy to a place just over the creek, where he was believed

to be harbored. He wanted more men to surround the house.

"Take a detail and arrest him, or burn the house," ordered the General, angrily. "It is a perfect nest of treason—even the slaves are rebels!" he said to himself, as he walked up and down, as though in justification of his savage order. He put his hand in his pocket. It struck a little square envelope.

"Or wait," he called to the captain, who was just withdrawing. "I will go there myself, and take it for my head-quarters. It is a better place than this. I cannot stand this smoke any longer. That will break up their treasonable work."

VI

SANTA CLAUS PASSES THE LINES

ALL that day the tongues of the two little ones at Holly Hill had been chattering unceasingly of the expected visit of Santa Claus that night. Mrs. Stafford had tried to explain to Charlie and Evelyn that it would be impossible for Santa Claus to bring them their presents this year; but she was met with the undeniable and unanswerable statement that their father had promised them. Before going to bed they had hung their stockings on the mantelpiece right in front of the chimney, so that Santa Claus would be sure to see them.

The mother had broken down over Evelyn's prayer, "not to forget my papa, and not to forget my dolly," and "to take care

of my papa and of Santa Claus and not to let the Yankees hurt 'em," and her tears fell silently after the little ones were asleep, as she put the finishing touches to the tiny gray uniform for Charlie. She was thinking not only of the children's disappointment, but of the absence of him on whose promise they had so securely relied. He had been away now for a year, and she had had no word of him for many weeks. Where was he? Was he dead or alive? Mrs. Stafford sank on her knees by the bedside.

"O God, give me faith like this little child!" she prayed again and again. She was startled by hearing a step on the front portico and a knock at the door.

Bob, who was working in front of the hall-fire, went to the door. His mother heard him answer doubtfully some question. She opened the door of her chamber and went out into the hall. A stranger with a large

bundle or pack on his back stood on the threshold. His clothes were shabby and old, his hat, which was still on his head, was pulled down over his eyes, and he wore a beard.

"An', leddy, wud ye bay so koind as to shelter a poor sthranger for a noight at this blissed time of pace and good-will?" he said, in a strong Irish brogue.

"Certainly," said Mrs. Stafford. with her eyes fixed on him. She moved slowly up to him. Then, by an instinct, quickly lifting her hand, she pushed his hat back from his eyes. Her husband clasped her in his arms.

"My darling!"

Bob, with a cry, seized him. "I knew you'd come, father," he said.

"They all said you would," declared Mrs. Stafford.

"Well, I *had* to come. I had given my word," said Colonel Stafford, smiling.

The Colonel was borne into the hall.

A little later the pack was opened, and such a treasure-house of toys and things was displayed as surely never greeted any other eyes. The smaller children, including Ran, were not awakened, at their father's request, though Mrs. Stafford wished to wake them to see him. But Bob was let into the secrets, except that he was not permitted to see a small package which bore his name. Mrs. Stafford and the Colonel were like two children themselves as they "tipped" about, stuffing the long stockings with candy and toys. The beautiful doll with flaxen hair, all arrayed in silk and lace, was seated, last of all, securely on top of Evelyn's stocking, with her wardrobe just below her, where she would greet her young mistress when she should first open her eyes, and Charlie's little blue uniform was pinned beside the gray one his mother had

made, with his sword buckled around the waist.

Bob was at last dismissed to his room, and the Colonel and Mrs. Stafford settled themselves before the fire, hand in hand, to talk over the past.

They had hardly started, when Bob rushed down the stairs and dashed into their room.

"Papa! papa! the yard is full of Yankees!"

Both the Colonel and Mrs. Stafford sprang to their feet.

"Through the back door!" cried Mrs. Stafford, seizing her husband.

"He cannot get out that way—they are everywhere—all around the house; I saw them from my window," gasped Bob, just as the sound of trampling without came to their ears.

"Oh! what will you do! Those clothes!

If they catch you in those clothes!" began Mrs. Stafford, and then stopped, her face growing ashy pale. Bob also turned even whiter than he had been before. He remembered the fate of the young man who was found in citizen's clothes in the autumn. He burst out crying. "Oh, papa! will they hang you?" he sobbed.

"I hope not, my son," said the Colonel. "Certainly not if I can prevent it." A gleam of humor stole into his eyes. "It's an awkward fix, certainly," he added, gravely.

A number of footsteps sounded on the porch, and a thundering knock shook the door.

"You must conceal yourself," cried Mrs. Stafford. "Come here." She pulled him almost by main force into a closet or entry, and locked the door, just as the knocking was renewed. As the front door was apparently about to be broken down, she

went out into the hall. Her face was deadly white, and her lips were moving in prayer.

"Who's there?" she called, tremblingly, trying to gain time.

"Open the door immediately, or it will be broken down," replied a stern voice.

She turned the great iron key in the heavy, old, brass lock, and a dozen men pushed into the hall. They all waited for one, a tall, elderly man in a general's fatigue-uniform, with a stern face and a grizzled beard. He addressed her.

"Madam, I have come to take possession of this house as my head-quarters."

Mrs. Stafford bowed, unable to speak. She was sensible of a feeling of relief; there was a gleam of hope. If they did not know of her husband's presence—? But the next word destroyed it.

"We have not interfered with you up to

the present time, but you have been harboring a spy here, and he is here now."

"There is no spy here, and has never been," said Mrs. Stafford, with dignity. "But if there were, you should not know it from me. It is not the custom of our people to deliver up those who have sought their protection." She spoke with much spirit.

The officer removed his hat. His keen eye was fixed on her white face. "We shall search the premises," he said, still sternly, but more respectfully than he had yet spoken. "Major, have the house thoroughly searched."

The men went striding off, opening doors and looking through the rooms. The General took a turn up and down the hall. He walked up to a door.

"That is my chamber, said Mrs. Stafford, quickly.

The officer fell back. "It must be searched," he said.

"My little children are asleep in there," said Mrs. Stafford, her face quite white.

"It must be searched," repeated the General, more gently. "Either they must do it, or I. You can take your choice."

Mrs. Stafford stood aside and made a gesture of assent. She could not trust her voice. He opened the door and stepped across the threshold. There he stopped. His eye took in the scene. Charlie was lying in the little trundle-bed in the corner, calm and peaceful, and by his side was Evelyn, her little face looking like a flower, lying in the tangle of golden hair which fell over her pillow. The noise disturbed her slightly, for she smiled suddenly, and muttered something about "Santa Tlaus" and a "dolly." The officer's gaze swept the room, and fell on the overcrowded stockings

hanging from the mantel. He advanced to the fireplace and examined the doll and trousers closely. With a curious expression on his face he leant over and gazed earnestly down at the two little heads on their pillow. Then he turned and walked out of the room, closing the door softly behind him.

"Major," he said to the officer in charge of the searching party, who descended the stairs just then, "take the men back to camp, except the sentinels. There is no spy here."

In a moment Mrs. Stafford came out of her chamber. The old officer was walking up and down in deep thought. Suddenly, as the last soldier disappeared through the door, he turned to her: "Mrs. Stafford, be so kind as to go and tell Colonel Stafford that General Denby desires him to surrender himself."

Mrs. Stafford was struck dumb. She was unable to move or to speak.

"Kindly present my compliments and say he need not hurry; I shall wait for him," said the General, quietly, throwing himself into an arm-chair, and looking steadily into the fire.

VII

BOB SECURES A UNIFORM

AS his father concealed himself, Bob had left the chamber. He was in a perfect agony of mind. He knew that his father could not escape, and if he were found dressed in citizen's clothes he felt that he could have but one fate. Once the men went toward the passage that led through to the rear entry in which his father was concealed. Bob's heart stood still; but he acted quickly. He flung himself on the floor right in the entrance and began to work quietly by the dim firelight. The searchers passed by. All sorts of schemes for rescue entered his head. Suddenly he thought of a small group of prisoners he

had seen pass by about dark. He had talked with one of them, a major. A guard said they were on their way to General Denby's camp. He would save him! Putting on his hat, he opened the front door and slipped out. A sentinel tramping up and down on the porch accosted him surlily to know where he was going.

"Won't you come in and get warm?" said Bob, hospitably.

"Can't. Wish I could. It's cold enough out here. Cold as th' State of Maine. I wish I was in old York right now by a good stove."

"I wish you were, too," said Bob, with sincerity.

"I'd give a mite to see that old white steeple again, and the moonlight on the snow stretching down toward the mill-pond; and hear the tide ripping in."

"What do you do with your prisoners when you catch them?" inquired Bob.

"Send some on to prison — and hang some."

"I mean when you first catch them."

"Oh, they stay in camp. We don't treat 'em bad, without they be spies. There's a batch at camp now, got in this evening — sort o' Christmas-gift." The soldier laughed as he stamped his feet to keep warm.

"Where's your camp?" Bob asked.

"About a mile from here, right on the road, or rather right on the hill at the edge o' the pines 'yond the crick."

The boy left him, and sauntered in and out among the other men who were building a fire in the yard. Presently he moved on to the edge of the lawn beyond them. No one took further notice of him. In a second he had slipped through the gate, and was flying across the field. He knew

every foot of the ground as well as a hare, for he had been hunting and setting traps over it since he was as big as little Charlie. He had to make a detour at the creek to avoid the picket at the bridge, and the dense briers in the bottom were very bad and painful. However, he worked his way through, though his face and hands were severely scratched. Into the creek he plunged. "Outch!" He had stepped into a hole up to his waist, and the water was as cold as ice. However, he was soon through, and at the top of the hill he could see the glow of the camp-fires lighting up the sky.

He crept up cautiously, and saw the dark forms of the sentinels pacing backward and forward wrapped in their overcoats, now lit up by the fire, then growing black against its blazing embers, then lit up again, and passing away into the shadow. How could

he ever get by them? His heart began to beat and his teeth to chatter, but he walked boldly up.

"Halt! who goes there?" cried the sentry, bringing his gun down and advancing on him.

Bob kept on, and the sentinel, finding that it was only a boy, looked rather sheepish. To the men about the camp-fire his appearance was the signal for fun.

"Don't let him capture you, Jim," called one of them; "Call the Corporal of the Guard," another; "Order up the reserves," a third. "He's a Christmas-gift for you; I'm going to put him in your stocking," laughed one. "It's big enough to hold him," said another.

Bob had to undergo something of an examination. Where had he come from?

"I know the little Johnny," said one of the men. "He lives over in the white

house on the hill to that side of the creek."

They told Bob to draw up to the fire, and made quite a fuss over him. Bob had his wits about him and soon learned that a batch of prisoners were at a fire a hundred yards farther back. He therefore made his way over there, although he was advised to stay where he was and get dry, and had many offers of a bunk from his new friends, some of whom followed him over to where the prisoners were.

Most of the prisoners were quartered for the night in a hut before which a guard was stationed. One or two, however, sat around the camp-fire, chatting with their guards Among these was a major in full uniform. Bob singled him out: he was just about his father's size.

Bob was instantly the centre of attraction. Again he told them he was from Holly Hill;

again he was recognized by one of the men.

"Run away to join the army?" asked one.

"No," said Bob, his eyes flashing at the suggestion.

"Lost?"

"No."

"Mother whipped you?"

"No."

As soon as their curiosity had somewhat subsided, Bob, who had hardly been able to contain himself, said to the Confederate major in a low undertone:

"My father, Colonel Stafford, is at home, concealed, and the Yankees have taken possession of the house."

"Well?" said the Major, looking down at him as if casually.

"He cannot escape. He came to-night through the lines, and he has on citizen's

clothes, and—" Bob's voice choked suddenly as he gazed at the Major's uniform.

"Well?" The prisoner for a second looked sharply down at the boy's earnest face. Then he put his hand under his chin, and lifting it, looked into his eyes. Bob shivered and a sob escaped him.

The Major placed his hand firmly on his knee. "Why, you are wringing wet," he said, aloud. "I wonder you are not frozen to death." He rose and stripped off his coat. "Here, get into this;" and before the boy knew it the Major had bundled him into his coat, and rolled up the sleeves so that Bob could use his hands. The action attracted the attention of the rest of the group, and several of the soldiers offered to take the boy and give him dry clothes.

"No, sir," laughed the Major; "this boy is a rebel. Do you think he will wear one of your Yankee suits? He's a little major,

and I'm going to give him a major's uniform."

In a minute he had stripped off his trousers, and was helping Bob into them, standing himself in his underclothes in the icy air. The legs were twice too long for the boy, and the waist came up to his arm-pits.

"Now go home to your mother," said the Major, laughing at his appearance; "and some of you fellows get me some clothes or a blanket. I'll wear your Yankee uniform out of sheer necessity."

Bob trotted around, keeping as far away from the light of the camp-fires as possible. He soon found himself unobserved, and reaching the shadow of a line of huts, and keeping well in it, he came to the edge of the camp. He watched his opportunity, and when the sentry's back was turned he slipped out into the darkness. In an instant he was flying down the hill. The

heavy clothes impeded him, and he stopped only long enough to snatch them off and roll them into a bundle, and sped on his way again. He struck the main road, and was running down it as fast as his legs could carry him, when he suddenly found himself almost on a group of dark objects who were standing in the road just in front of him. One of them moved. It was the picket. He had forgotten all about them. Bob suddenly stopped. His heart was in his throat.

"Who goes there?" said a stern voice. Bob's heart beat as if it would spring out of his body.

"Come in; we have you," said the man, advancing.

Bob sprang across the ditch beside the road, and putting his hand on the top rail of the low fence, flung himself over it, bundle and all, flat on the other side, just as a blaze

of light burst from the picket, and the report of a carbine startled the silent night. The bullet grazed the boy's arm, and crashed through the rail. In a second Bob was on his feet. The picket was almost on him. Seizing his bundle, he dived into the thicket as a half-dozen shots were sent ringing after him, the bullets hissing and whistling over his head. Several men dashed into the woods after him in hot pursuit, and a couple more galloped up the road to intercept him; but Bob's feet were winged, and he slipped through briers and brush like a scared hare. They scratched his face and threw him down, but he was up again. Now and then a shot crashed behind him, but he did not care for that; he thought only of being caught.

A few hundred yards up the stream he plunged into the water, and wading across, was soon safe from his pursuers. Breath-

less, he climbed the hill, made his way through the woods, and emerged into the open fields. Across these he sped like a deer. He had almost given out. What if they should have caught his father, and he should be too late! A sob escaped him at the bare thought, and he broke again into a fast run, wiping off with his sleeve the tears that would come. The wind cut him like a knife, but he did not mind that.

As he neared the house he feared that he might be stopped again and the clothes taken from him, so he paused for a moment, and slipped them on once more, rolling up the sleeves and legs as well as he could. He crossed the yard undisturbed. He went around to the same door by which he had come out, for he thought this his best chance. The same sentinel was there, walking up and down, blowing his cold hands. Had his father been arrested?

Bob's teeth chattered, but it was with suppressed excitement.

"Your clothes seem to 'a' grown a mite since you went out?" said the sentry, quizzically.

"Yes, I was co-co-cold," stammered Bob.

"'Tis pretty cold," said the sentry.

"Ye—es," gasped Bob.

"Your mother's been out here, looking for you, I guess," said the soldier, with much friendliness.

"I rec—reckon so," panted Bob, moving toward the door. Did that mean that his father was caught? He opened the door and slipped quietly into the corridor.

General Denby still sat silent before the hall-fire. Bob listened at the chamber-door. His mother was weeping; his father stood calm and resolute before the fire. He had determined to give himself up.

"If you only did not have on those clothes!" sobbed Mrs. Stafford. "If I only had not cut up the old uniform for the children!"

"Mother! mother! I have one!" gasped Bob, bursting into the room and tearing off the unknown major's uniform.

VIII

SANTA CLAUS SURRENDERS

TEN minutes later Colonel Stafford, with a steady step and a proud carriage, and with his hand resting on Bob's shoulder, walked out into the hall. He was dressed in the uniform of a Confederate major, which fitted admirably his tall, erect figure.

"General Denby, I believe," he said, as the Union officer rose and faced him. "We have met before under somewhat different circumstances," he said, with a bow, "for I now find myself your prisoner."

"I have the honor to request your parole," said the General, with great politeness, "and to express the hope that I may be able in

some way to return the courtesy which I formerly received at your hands." He extended his hand and Colonel Stafford took it.

"You have my parole," said he.

"I was not aware," said the General, with a bow toward Mrs. Stafford, "until I entered the room where your children were sleeping, that I had the honor of your husband's acquaintance. I will now take my leave and return to my camp, that I may not by my presence interfere with the joy of this season."

"I desire to introduce to you my son," said Colonel Stafford, proudly presenting Bob. "He is a hero."

The General bowed as he shook hands with him. Perhaps he had some suspicion how true a hero he was, for he rested his hand kindly on the boy's head, but said nothing

Both Colonel and Mrs. Stafford invited

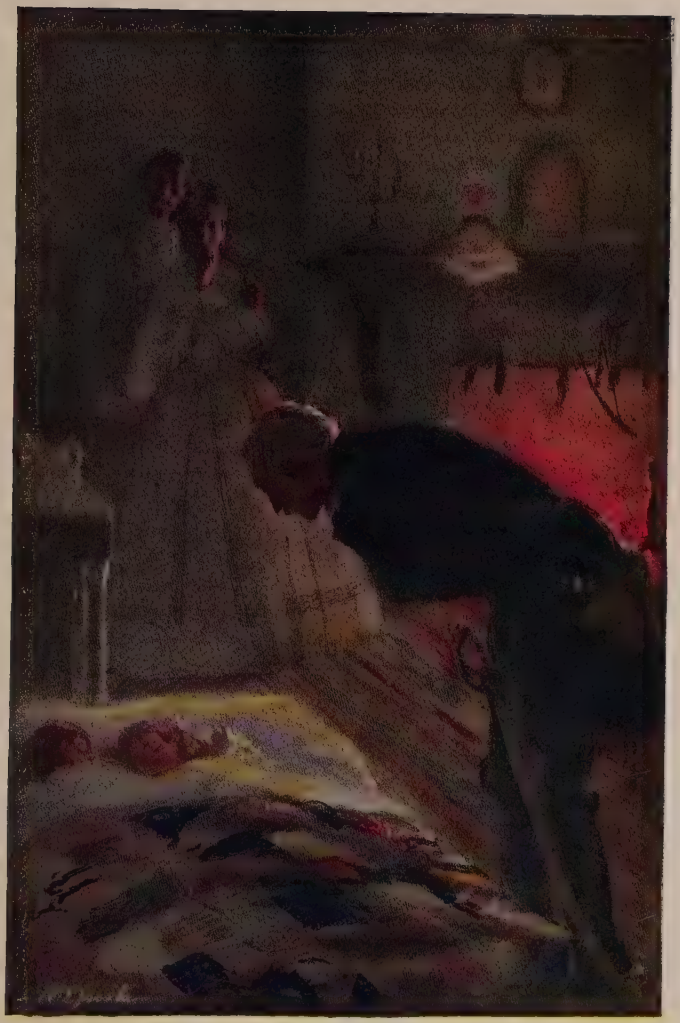
the old soldier to spend the night there, but he declined. He, however, accepted an invitation to dine with them next day.

Before leaving, he requested permission to take one more look at the sleeping children. Over Evelyn he bent silently. Suddenly stooping, he kissed her little pink cheek, and with a scarcely audible "Good-night," passed quickly out of the room and left the house.

The next morning, by light, there was great rejoicing. Charlie and Evelyn were up betimes, and were laughing and chattering over their presents like two little magpies.

"Those Yankees did not catch Santa Claus at all. Here's my sword and here's my breeches," cried Charlie, "two pair; but I'm goin' to put on my gray ones. I ain't goin' to wear a blue uniform."

"Here's my dolly!" screamed Evelyn, in



Over Evelyn he bent silently.

an ecstasy over her beautiful present. Just then their father sat up and spoke to them. With a cry they gathered up their presents and made a dash for him.

"Just see what Santa Claus brought us," they cried, hugging him warmly.

"How did you tum?" asked Evelyn, in a pause.

"Oh, don't you know 't Santa Claus brought him to mamma?" said Charlie, arrogantly. "Papa, did he let you drive the reindeer?"

Presently Bob and Ran burst in, their eyes fairly dancing.

"Christmas-gift! It's a real one—real gold!" cried Bob, holding up a small gold watch, while Ran was shouting over a silver watch of the same size.

That evening, after dinner, General Denby was sitting by the fire in the Holly

Hill parlor, with Evelyn nestled in his lap, her dolly clasped close to her bosom, and, in the absence of Colonel Stafford, who had walked out, with the older boys, the General told Mrs. Stafford the story of the opening of the package by the camp-fire. The tears welled up in Mrs. Stafford's eyes and ran down her cheeks.

Charlie suddenly entered, in all the majesty of his new breeches, and sword buckled on hip. He saw his mother's tears. His little face flushed. In a second his sword was out, and he struck a hostile attitude.

"You sha'n't make my mamma cry!" he shouted.

"Charlie! Charlie!" cried Mrs. Stafford, hastening to stop him.

"My papa said I was not to let anyone make you cry," insisted the boy, stepping before his mother, and still keeping his angry eyes on the General.

"Oh, Charlie!" Mrs. Stafford took hold of him. "I am ashamed of you!—to be so rude!"

"Let him alone, madam," said the General. "It is not rudeness; it is spirit—the spirit of our race. He has the soldier's blood, and some day he will be a soldier himself, and a brave one. I shall count on him for the Union," he said, with a smile.

Mrs. Stafford shook her head. But the General nodded again, and, drawing the little boy to his knees, told him of his father's showing him the sword by the camp-fire when he himself was a prisoner.

A few days later, Colonel Stafford, in accordance with an understanding, went over to General Denby's camp, and reported to be sent on to Washington as a prisoner of war. The General was absent on the lines at the time, but was expected

soon, and the Colonel waited for him at his head-quarters. There had been many tears shed when his wife bade him good-by.

About an hour after the Colonel left home, the General and his staff were riding back to camp along the road which ran by the Holly Hill gate. Just before they reached it, two little figures came out of the gate and started down the road. One was a boy of five, who carried a toy sword, drawn, in one hand, whilst with the other he led his companion, a little girl of three, who clasped a large yellow-haired doll to her breast.

The soldiers cantered forward and overtook them. The little girl shrank behind her brother where he stood, stoutly, holding her behind him with one hand while with the other he clutched his small sword, defiantly.

"Where are you going, my little people?"

"I'm goin' to get my papa," said the tiny swordsman.

inquired the General, reining in and gazing down at them affectionately.

"I'm goin' to get my papa," said the tiny swordsman, firmly, turning a sturdy and determined little face up to him. "My mamma's cryin', an' I'm goin' to take my papa home. I ain' goin' to let the Yankees have him."

The officers all broke into a murmur of mingled admiration and amusement.

"No, we ain' goin' let the Yankees have our papa," chimed in Evelyn, pushing her tangled hair out of her eyes, and keeping fast hold of Charlie's hand for fear of the horses around her.

The General dismounted.

"How are you going to help, my little Semiramis?" he asked, stooping over her, with smiling eyes.

"I'm goin' to give 'em my dolly if they will give me my papa," she said, gravely,

as if she understood the equality of the exchange.

"Suppose you give a kiss instead?" There was a second of hesitation, and then she put up her little face, and the old General dropped on one knee in the road and lifted her in his arms, doll and all.

"Gentlemen," he said to his staff, "you behold the future defenders of the Union."

The little ones were coaxed home, Charlie in front of a staff-officer, and Evelyn in front of General Denby himself. And that afternoon, as Colonel Stafford was expecting to leave the camp for Washington with a lot of prisoners, a despatch was brought in to General Denby, who smiled as he read it.

"Colonel," he said, addressing him, "I think I shall have to continue your parole a few days longer. I have just received information that, by a special cartel which I have arranged, you are to be exchanged for

Colonel McDowell as soon as he can reach the lines at this point from Richmond; and meantime, as we have but indifferent accommodations here, I shall have to request you to consider Holly Hill as your place of confinement. Will you be so kind as to convey my respects to Mrs. Stafford, and to your young hero, Bob, and make good my word to those two little commissioners of exchange, to whom I feel somewhat committed?" He held out his hand.

"I wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year."